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SAVED FROM GANGA.

PRASANNA AND KAMINI

*THE HISTORY OF A YOUNG
HINDU*



LONDON
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE chief part of the original of this story was written by the late Mrs. Mullens of Calcutta. After her death it was completed by other members of her family, and published under the title of *Faith and Victory*. With the consent of Dr. Mullens, it was translated into the Hindi language of the North-West Provinces of India, and brought out as a serial in the Anglo-Hindi monthly periodical *The Aryan*, published at Mirzapore. In this translation considerable liberty was taken with the original story, to adapt it to the circumstances of the North-West Provinces, and to the more advanced stage of religious opinion. New scenes and discussions were introduced, and some minor details of the original story omitted. The English re-translation of this adapted form of the story is now reprinted entire, with revision, by the Religious Tract Society, for circulation both in England and India. The illustrations have been prepared with a view to both the English and the vernacular Hindi editions.

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CHAPTER I.

THE GANGA SAGAR MELA.

THERE are many celebrated places of pilgrimage in India. Among these Ganga Sagar is famous, because there the river Ganges, which the Hindus honour as a goddess, enters the sea. The sand which comes down from the mountains, floating in the waters of the river, is there collected together, settles into new land, and thus an island has been formed, to which the name of Sagar has been given. This land is very barren, and nothing is to be seen in the shape of trees or vegetation, except tall jungle-grass. A temple has been built on this place to Kapil Muni, about whom there is a legend in the Shastras, which, in the opinion of all Hindus, imparts a special sanctity to the place. The legend is as follows :—

Manu Vaivaswata had a son, Ikshwaku, who was at the head of the Solar dynasty. His grandson Kukutstha was Raja of Ayodhya. In the 35th generation from him Sagar was born, and his great-grandson was Bhagirath. In the 18th generation after

him came Dasarath, the father of Ram. Raja Sagar wished to obtain an abode in the heaven of Indra, and began to make the great horse sacrifice. After he had done this ninety-nine times, and was engaged in the hundredth sacrifice, Indra stole away the horse.

Sagar then sent his 60,000 sons in search of the horse. They found it near Kapil Muni, who was practising austerities on the sea-shore, and, supposing that he had stolen it, they gave him a severe beating. The sage cursed them, and they were burnt to ashes. To deliver them from everlasting destruction, it was necessary that the goddess Ganga should descend from heaven to save them. Bhagirath, with the help of Vishnu, prevailed on the goddess to come down to earth for this purpose. First of all she came to her father Himavat, that is, the snowy mountains in the north of India. There she was detained for many years in the locks of the god Shiv. The meaning of this plainly is that the Ganges, which issues from the snow-beds and glaciers of the mountains, hangs in long icicles till it is melted by the heat of the sun. After this the Ganges left the mountains, under the guidance of Bhagirath, and entered the plains at Haridwar. From thence it flowed on, until at length, as the outlet or effluent which is called the Bhagirathi, and afterwards the river Hugli, which flows by Calcutta, it entered the sea by the shore of the island on which the sons of Sagar had been destroyed. After that it is said the goddess descended to the infernal regions, and accomplished the salvation of the sons of Sagar. In this legend the river and the goddess, the

mountains and the gods, this world and the next, fact and fiction, are mixed up together in a wonderful way. But the legends of the Shastras are after this fashion.

The Ganga Sagar Mela is held every year at the time of the winter solstice, that is, about the middle of January. At that time, pilgrims, faqirs, devotees, and thousands of all kinds of people, are collected together in that desolate place, in order to wash away their sins at the junction of the river and the sea. Men, women, and children come from a long distance in the depth of winter in boats, and many of them die from cold, hunger, and hardship. At times, even now, a man may be seen dying alone, except that near him vultures, dogs, and jackals are collecting, in order to devour his dead body. In former times, the funeral pile might often be seen being made ready for the burning of a widow; but for many years the Government has forbidden and put a stop to this inhuman custom. In one place there is a temple, near which is a muddy tank, and women may be seen descending into it and bringing out the mud and stones, which they think will operate as charms to obtain children for them. On all sides there is heard the sound of the conch and other instruments of music, and the loud murmur of the crowds.

But the object of the crowds thus assembled is not purely religious, for many tradesmen and merchants come there for purposes of gain. Along the sea-shore innumerable boats are fastened, and near to them on the sand, long lines of booths, made of bamboo and matting, are erected, and ornamented with red flags.

All kinds of merchandise may be obtained in these booths, such as the satins of Persia, the shawls of Cashmere, the jewelry of Delhi, the gold embroidery of Benares, and all kinds of inferior articles. Besides this, every sort of amusement, pleasure, and indulgence is provided for; and in the place where for the rest of the year only tigers and jackals dwell, and where on all sides nothing is to be seen but a sandy desert and the water of the ocean, for a few days, on account of the Mela, there is as much uproar as if some great Raja were holding a feast or entertainment.

About seventy years ago a Christian missionary went to this Mela, in order to preach to the pilgrims the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he beheld the crowds he was deeply grieved, because it was evident from their whole conduct and manner that they were ignorant of the one true God, and were not walking in the sure way of salvation. When he began to speak to them on the subject, they would not listen to him,—indeed, some of them treated him with disrespect. So that all his efforts seemed to be unprofitable and vain.

Just then, the missionary observed a small company of persons, who looked like a family, making their way towards the new temple of Kapil Muni, and as he looked at them his heart was drawn towards them, and he followed them. The temple was a small square one, but the foundations of the old temple, which were visible, showed that it had once been much larger. The family consisted of a respectable Brahmani and her two sons, one a beautiful youth about twelve years

of age, the other a child of a few months only. With them were two female attendants, who, like the Brahmani, were weeping bitterly. Not far from the temple there was a stone image of Kapil Muni, and behind it the Mahant or officiating priest of the temple was seated. A little further off there was another stone, on which the figure of the stolen horse of Sagar was engraved, and there were images of Hanuman and other *deotas* all around. As the Brahmani drew near to the temple she did reverence to it three times, and then approached the Mahant. In another chapter will be explained what kind of interview took place between them.





CHAPTER II.

CHILD-MURDER.

WHEN the Brahmani came to the Mahant she made him an offering of a gold *mohar*, in a muslin handkerchief embroidered with silver. Her elder son also, who was called Mahendra, laid a length of silk cloth at his feet. Then the mother, with trembling hands, opened the hands of her little son, from which the Mahant took the silver bells which had previously adorned the feet of the unconscious child. The Mahant was exceedingly pleased with this arrangement, and dismissed them all with his blessing. They departed sadly, and soon joined the crowd, which was moving towards the chief bathing-place, at the south part of the Mela.

When they reached the place, four priests met them; on seeing them the Brahmani uttered a shriek, and fell senseless to the ground; her female attendants lifted her up, and helped her to walk to the sea-shore, where there was a large crowd assembled. The chief priest then took the little child from the hands of its brother, anointed its body with oil, ver-

million, and saffron, dressed it in red and yellow muslin, and began to utter all kinds of incantations over it.

When the missionary saw what was going on he was struck with horror and anxiety; for all at once the thought flashed upon his mind that assuredly they were about to commit child-murder; and he resolved, with the help of God, whatever might happen, if possible to prevent this horrid crime. The Government had that very year forbidden the perpetration of such acts; but this new order had not been thoroughly published abroad, and what could a solitary missionary do against the infuriated priests and the excited crowd? Then he remembered that there must certainly be, somewhere or other in the Mela, a company of the soldiers of Government, who would prevent the commission of such crimes; so he ran off immediately to call them.

Meanwhile, as soon as the child was ready to be sacrificed, the priests endeavoured to arouse the unconscious mother. At last, opening her eyes and seeing what was about to take place, she again fell prostrate on the ground, exclaiming, 'Can nothing save my child?' The Brahman replied, 'No, nothing. You made the vow, and you must fulfil it. But the goddess wishes you to do it willingly. Do you consent or not?' The agonized mother exclaimed, 'No, I do not consent. If I am cursed for not fulfilling my vow, I am cursed! It were better to die than be as I am!'

Upon this the Brahman was very angry, and said, .

‘Certainly the curse will come. Not upon you, but on your eldest son, who is your delight. You made this vow in order to save his life, and now you break it. Know, O woman! the goddess Ganga curses you, and I curse you! To-morrow you will take away this child with you, but the ashes of your elder son will remain upon the funeral pile. Do you not now consent?’

No answer was heard to these words. The mother could not speak for anguish. Upon this the impatient priest cried out, ‘If you cannot speak, wave your hand, that I may offer your child to the goddess.’ The mother gave the sign, and the crowd shouted, ‘Victory! Victory!’ Then the priest took the child in his arms, and said, ‘O goddess Ganga! last year the mother of this child vowed, before it was born, to offer it to thee, if thou wouldest restore her elder son to health. Now receive it!’ On saying this he threw the child into the sea. A little splash was heard, and then in a moment the child was again safe in its mother’s arms. Maddened with suffering, she had rushed into the sea and saved it. Then she cried out, ‘No! no! Ganga shall not have it. I was mad when I made the vow. I cannot see my babe drowning.’ The Brahman again commenced to threaten her severely; and perhaps she might have again yielded to him, but just at the moment when he was about to cast the child a second time into the sea the missionary held back his arm. The company of soldiers now arrived, and on seeing them the priest and the crowd all ran away, leaving the family with the missionary and the soldiers.

When the afflicted mother saw that her cruel enemies had gone, she fell at the feet of the missionary and blessed him, saying, 'Oh, sir! a thousand blessings on you, because you have saved my beloved child. May the great God reward you! may you have seven sons! may your wealth increase! May you have great honour! May your prosperity always be fresh and green!' When a Brahmani could use such language to a foreign missionary, it was plain that her pride of caste had been overcome for a time by her maternal affection. Having said this, she began to show in her countenance the evident signs of anxious sadness mingling with her new joy; for turning towards the soldiers she said, 'Alas! I had forgotten! Through the curse of the Brahman, I must leave my eldest son Mahendra on a funeral pile on this island. O miserable mother that I am! can I only save one child by sacrificing another?'

The soldiers, who were themselves Hindus, were greatly distressed at hearing these words, and, seeing her sorrowful countenance, said to her, 'No! Mahendra shall not die. You have fulfilled your vow: it was we who hindered you. If Ganga is so malignant, her curse will come upon us, not upon you or yours.'

On hearing these words, a fresh ray of delight shone in the face of the bewildered woman, and turning to her female attendants she said, 'Come, Dasee and Tara, let us leave this horrible place, and get into the boat. God grant that we may never see this place again!' Her attendants replied, 'O lady! do not say such words, for this is a holy place. Is it

not called so in the Shastras? If you say such things, our boat will be wrecked by the goddess Ganga, and we shall never arrive safely at home.'

The Brahmani replied, 'May the gods forgive my thoughtless words! I do not mean any harm or disrespect to them. But how can I tell you how my heart has been broken, and what horrible thoughts have come into it about the goddess? But I will not tell you; and I will, so far as I can, make atonement for them by penance, fasting, prayers, and alms.' On this the Brahmani and her household took leave of the missionary and the soldiers.

From the time when such events as these could take place to the present day, a great change has been going on among the people of India. There are but few men now who consider child-murder a religious act; and, at the present time, the power and authority of the priests, as compared with former days, have greatly declined. Almost all Hindus are now sure that Christian missionaries are their true and helpful friends; and the religious ideas of the common people are a little more correct than they used to be. Of this great change there is one special cause, which has been diffused, and is now operating more or less throughout the country, and one, too, which will continue to increase. Of this some account will be given in succeeding chapters.



CHAPTER III.

RETURN HOME WITH THE INCORRUPTIBLE SEED.

WHEN the Brahmani and her companions were on their way to the place where their boat was fastened, a sudden thought struck the mind of the missionary and acted on him like a Divine inspiration ; for he immediately called out after them, ‘Oh ! Mahendra, just stop a moment ; here is a book for you. Take care of it, and read it at your leisure.’ Saying this he gave him a Bengalee book, called the New Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the boy saw it, he drew back a little, as if the book were an unclean thing, and looked towards his mother for advice as to what he should do. ‘Take it, Mahendra,’ she said ; ‘take it, or else the gentleman who saved your brother’s life will be displeased.’ Then she turned towards the missionary and said, ‘Oh, sir ! I know that his father will not allow him to read this or any other Christian book ; but I promise you one thing—that, from a regard to your wish, the book shall never be destroyed.’

The missionary answered, 'I am thankful for even that promise. But if you only knew what is the purport of the book, and if then your children were to read it, you would be very glad; for it contains an account of the holy Jesus Christ, who shed His precious blood as an atonement for the sins of the world, and bore the punishment of sin, which is death. By believing in Him we obtain forgiveness of sin. There is no need, therefore, to bathe in this water; nor can there be any benefit in so doing. God is indeed the sea of love; and that is why He sent His beloved Son Jesus Christ into this world, in order that sinful men might not perish, while endeavouring to work out their own salvation; and Jesus, being sinless Himself, died instead of sinners. He, indeed, would never thus demand your child of you; for the world is His, and the fulness thereof. He only asks your heart. Love Him, and believe in Him, with all your soul, and then salvation is yours.'

When the Brahmani heard these words, though she thought them very strange, she stored them in her mind; and, though she did not well know what they meant, she continued thinking about them, until at length she became perplexed, and, turning suddenly to the missionary, hastily took leave of him, saying, 'Oh, sir! I ought not to listen to such words. If Mahendra's father knew that I had listened to them for a moment, what would he say?' Saying this she departed.

Undoubtedly what the missionary said must have sounded very strange to the Brahmani, for she knew

nothing beyond the traditions of her own country. But the missionary knew that what he had said was true, and that it was the incorruptible seed of eternal life for man. And he knew this not merely by tradition, but because, after having examined it by rational and experimental proof, he had found it to be altogether true. Therefore he felt it to be a solemn duty to proclaim it to all who would hear. And whoever will examine it in this way will certainly find it true also.

After this the Brahmani and her children travelled towards their home, where they arrived on the fifth day. She looked forward with mingled feelings of joy and fear to the meeting with her husband, uncertain whether he would be angry because the vow had not been performed, or whether his fatherly affection would triumph. As she entered the door of the house she hid her sleeping child in her dress, deliberating when to disclose to his father the half-sad, half-joyous secret that the child was living. At the time the Brahman was engaged in his mid-day devotions, and, having finished the worship of Shiv, was offering prayers to his tutelary god. Just then he heard the voice of Mahendra describing the journey to their old nurse. This led him to finish his prayers quickly, and go into his wife's apartment to hear the news.

When he saw that his wife met him with a calm and cheerful countenance, he was astonished, and said, 'Oh, mother of Mahendra! the goddess Ganga has taken our babe, and how can you, who have thrown him into the sea, appear so calm? God be praised

that he supports you so ! The gods do not show such kindness to me. Twice have I put 5000 Rs. into a bag to send it by a servant to you, that you might appease the goddess by giving it to the Brahmans, and bring back our child ; and twice I called the servant back again, for I fear the curse of the gods. Yes ; it certainly is better to perform our vow and escape the curse. But you do not appear lovely to me, with such a cheerful countenance. My heart is wounded at such a sight ; for it is contrary to a mother's nature : O woman ! what have you done ? Do speak.'

The Brahmani now saw that she must be silent no longer, and, falling at her husband's feet, she exclaimed, 'If the child had really been sacrificed, do you think I could have lived to tell it ? No ! no ! the child is not dead ; he is sleeping quietly in his cradle.'

'How ?' said the trembling father. 'And the curse ; did you not fear that ? It will certainly come upon us. O woman ! woman what have you done ?'

His wife answered, 'Before blaming me, please have a little patience.' Then she told him all the particulars of the saving of his child's life. The father listened with beating heart and glistening eyes, and then rushed into the next room to embrace his child, exclaiming, 'Yes ! yes ! those soldiers were right ; the goddess will not take vengeance on us.'

After this, when Mahendra and his father had taken some food, the father said, 'Well, my boy ! what have you brought, with you in remembrance of Ganga Sagar ?' Mahendra, when he heard this, ran to his

mother, who was just sitting down to take her food, and said to her, 'Mother, let me have the things we have brought from the Mela, as father wants to see them.' His mother, forgetting the New Testament, threw him her bunch of keys, saying, 'Look into the green box. They are all there. But let me take my food now.'

The Brahmani had said nothing to her husband about her conversation with the missionary; for she feared that he might be displeased at it. But now Mahendra had brought the Bengalee book with the other things, and said to his father, 'Look! here is a little vessel of Ganges water; here are some Bel leaves and lotus flowers which I took out of the water; and here is a beautiful box for mother to keep her jewels in; and here is a silk dress I have brought for myself, and a muslin one for you.' While the father was listening to all this, he saw the Bengalee New Testament, and said, 'Ah! here is another Ramayan. Were not the three we already have enough? Why did your mother buy this too?' Mahendra instantly remembered that his mother wished this matter to be kept secret, and, with native cunning and deceit, took the book in his hand, and said, 'Yes, this is for uncle; he wanted one like this to be got in the Mela, and gave mother the money for it.' He then instantly ran to his mother and told her his artful stratagem. She commended him for it, took the book, and, putting it in a safe place of concealment, said, 'Whatever happens, I will keep my promise to that good man, and not let this book be destroyed.'

At that time neither the mother nor the son knew that the words of that book were the incorruptible seed of eternal life, and that no one who receives these words in faith could possibly practise the deceit which they were then practising.





CHAPTER IV.

FIFTY YEARS LATER.

THE readers of this affecting history must know that from the time when the events recorded in the preceding chapters occurred, until those of the present chapter, about fifty years had passed away; and in an interval like that a great many changes take place. The family of the Brahmani and her son continued to live in the same house as before; but they themselves were much altered. First of all a description of the house must be given, and afterwards something will be said about the family.

The house was built in a garden near Calcutta, in Bengal, the principal entrance being from the south. The garden, which was surrounded with a high wall, contained a tank, and trees of several kinds—such as palm, date, plantain, orange, bamboo, etc. The visitor on passing through the principal door enters a court about fifty feet square, and straight before him is the ‘dalan,’ or hall, in which the worship of Durga, Kali, and Kartakiya is performed. The hall is lofty, and is

entered by steps from the court. It is filled with many different idols, most of which look dirty, being covered with dust; but on festivals they are cleaned, and adorned with glittering garments. There are verandahs all round the court, into which the doors of the apartments open. All these are the apartments of the men, and this part of the house is called the 'Suddur Ghar.'

To the north of this hall there is another court like the first, which is called 'Antahpur,' *i.e.* the inner or women's apartments. There is a private passage to it from the first court, and the women can pass from it into the hall. There is also a place in the women's court called 'Thakur Ghar,' or house of god, where the women generally worship. This is filled with images of the household gods and goddesses, and there the women perform their daily devotions. The other apartments in this court consist of cooking and sleeping rooms. Mahendra's house was two-storied, and contained many apartments, which were occupied by different relatives of the family. The hall was the only apartment which had no other room built over it. Nevertheless the roof of it was the highest of all, and the size and grandeur of it surpassed that of all the other apartments.

The master of this house was the same Mahendra of whose childhood a brief account has been given in the former chapters; but he has much changed, not only in appearance, but also in all his circumstances. His father, the orthodox Brahman, is dead, but his mother, who was thirty years younger than her husband, is

still living, and, but for the hardships of widowhood, her life is a contented and happy one.

Mahendra's hair is already turning grey. As head of the family he inherits the ancestral property, and generously supports a large number of indigent relatives in his own house. He was married at the time appointed, and has now four sons and one daughter. Three of his sons are also married, and the youngest is a student at college. The daughter is a beautiful, bright girl six years of age, the pet of the whole household.

The character and manners of Mahendra are much like those of his father. Like him he is somewhat austere, and very exact in attending to the ceremonies and observances of the Hindu religion. The chief wish of his heart was to see his sons following his example in reverence for the religion of their fathers. But in this he was doomed to disappointment; for, excepting his eldest son, Sarju Kumar, not one has paid the least regard to this wish. His second son Chandra Kumar, was a wild, dissipated youth, who ridiculed the reverence of his father for wood and stone. Indeed, people said that he had utterly corrupted himself, by eating, in company with other young men like himself, food forbidden in the Shastras.

The third son, Prasanna Kumar, was altogether different from both his brothers. Any stranger might have seen in his delicately formed, pale, and melancholy countenance that the seeds of consumption were already growing within him. His intellect, was both acute and strong, and he was most earnest and

enthusiastic in the consideration of all religious matters. He had examined the religious rites and ceremonies of his father and other aged Brahmans, and, having come to the conclusion that they were a monstrous collection of childish nonsense, disgusting impurity, and soul-destroying falsehood, had long since rejected them. The doctrines of the new Brahma Samaj strongly attracted his truth-loving soul, for he saw in their plausible reasonings and wonderful speculations a wide field for the exercise of controversy and scientific research. Then the brevity of the moral code of that Society and the simplicity of its worship pleased him; so that, strongly desiring to escape from the religion of the Purans, he soon became a disciple of the Brahma Samaj, and gave himself up to strenuous efforts of prayer, study, and reflection, in order to gain that knowledge of the Infinite Spirit which, according to the Brahma Samaj, is essential to salvation. But, notwithstanding all these efforts, he was still restless and unhappy.

This was the state of things when, on a fine evening in the summer, Prasanna called his youngest and favourite brother, Nawa Kumar, to accompany him in a walk. After they had left the house his younger brother asked, 'Are you going to the Samaj, brother?'

Prasanna answered, 'No; I am going to do something which our family would disapprove of; I did not mention it, therefore, in their presence. But I think you will keep my secret, will you not?'

'Oh, yes, brother,' said the lad, 'I will not betray you. Do I not love you better than all the world beside?'

‘Well, then,’ said Prasanna, ‘I am going to meet the Christian, Ram Dayal. I recently formed his acquaintance, and have had some religious discussions with him. In his opinion the Bible is the standard of truth. I am going to argue in defence of the Brahma Samaj. God grant that our religion may remain unshaken in this investigation of the truth! But somehow, Nawa, my hopes have not been fulfilled; the peace of mind I sought in it I have not yet found.’

The lad answered, ‘The reason of this, brother, is that you have not yet kept all the precepts of that religion. A few days ago our cousin said to me that until we can take in our hands all the precepts of that religion, and say with a clear conscience, “All these have I kept,” we can never know mental peace and rest.’

‘Can he say that himself?’ asked Prasanna.

‘Yes,’ said Nawa, ‘he says so.’

‘Alas!’ replied his brother, ‘in this matter his opinion and mine are very different. Is not forgiveness of the injuries of others commanded and praised in that religion? Is it not said to be “the highest wealth, the excellence of the weak and the glory of the strong?” And yet did we not hear the other day of a most shameful quarrel between our cousin and his father-in-law? No! no! Nawa, it is more difficult than he thinks for us to fulfil a pure moral law. That is the very thing that discourages me. I find myself every hour falling into sin. But here is Ram Dayal; let us go into the house with him.’

The young men saluted each other courteously, and

Nawa reluctantly followed. In his own mind he wished his brother safe at the Brahma Samaj; but he was too sincerely attached to him either to thwart his wishes or betray his purpose. Ram Dayal immediately set two seats for his visitors, and, placing a bright lamp and the Bible on the table, he sat down with them.

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It was such a meeting as the angels of heaven might look upon with interest. Before commencing the discussion, the Christian asked leave to say a few words of prayer to God. This request was courteously complied with by his heathen friends. Ram Dayal then stood up, and lifting up his heart to heaven said, 'Blessed Fountain of wisdom, light, life, and happiness, do Thou shine into our hearts. Teach us Thy whole will. Tell us what is acceptable service, and give us grace to walk in the path Thou mayest point out to us, that it may lead us to life eternal. This we ask not in our own name, but in the name of Thy beloved Son, Christ Jesus, who has made atonement for our sins.'

Whether the Hindu friends understood very well the meaning of this prayer, we have no means of knowing. But Prasanna often remembered it afterwards, and the words of it so exactly expressed his own spiritual want, that before reading the Bible or any other religious book he used involuntarily to say, 'Blessed Fountain of wisdom, light, life, and happiness, shine into my heart!'

The religious conversation which the three friends held together will be described in the next chapter.



CHAPTER V.

HEREDITARY DISPOSITION AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW RELIGION.

WHEN the missionary and the soldiers in the Ganga Sagar Mela saved the Brahman's little son from death, and the missionary afterwards gave Mahendra the Bengalee New Testament, and spoke pleasant and kind words to his mother, no one could have foretold what consequences would flow from these events. The name of the little boy was Rajendra, and it is no wonder the mother should have a peculiar affection for her child, who had been saved from death in such a manner. The Brahmani sometimes remembered the words of the missionary, that 'God was the true sea of love; that He had sent His beloved Son Jesus Christ into the world for the salvation of sinful men; and that He would never demand any one's child in that way,' etc. Recalling these words, and seeing her rescued child, and remembering how he had been rescued, she gradually came to feel a strong desire to hear something more about that wonderful message, and grew quite sure that any one who did

such a good work as the missionary had done could not be a bad man, nor could his religion be a bad thing; and thus unconsciously and involuntarily her mind was softened towards Christianity and Christian people, and she always thought of her boy as having been saved by a Christian missionary.

It was on this account, too, that a kind of secret affection was established between mother and son, in consequence of which the dispositions and aims of both grew daily more and more alike. For when Rajendra had passed his childhood and was becoming a youth, his mother had told him how and by whom he had been saved from destruction, and related to him what took place at the Mela on that occasion. And just as there was a strong resemblance between the elder son, Mahendra, and his father, so Rajendra and his mother were very much like each other. The father, like some other Brahmans, who are bigoted worshippers in the temples, and violently prejudiced in favour of their own religion and hostile to all others, thought that whatever is ancient and has been handed down by tradition must certainly be right and true, and whoever doubts it is an infidel; and that every new thing, especially if it belonged to a foreign religion, must as certainly be wicked, false, and noxious; and his eldest son, Mahendra, thought the same, and Mahendra's eldest son, Sarju Kumar, was more or less like them both. But the mother and Rajendra were different. For, taking counsel from a loving heart, the mother judged that he who has compassion on those in affliction and helps them, even though he be a foreigner, is

a good man, and that a religion which fosters kind dispositions and conduct must be very beneficial to the human race; and she habitually taught her dear boy Rajendra the same.

When Rajendra was old enough he was sent to school. Most of the youths in Bengal were eagerly desirous to learn the English language and science; and Rajendra persuaded his mother to ask his father's leave to attend one of the Government colleges to learn English. When his father heard this, at first he was very much displeased, for Mahendra had never learned English, and there was no one among all his connections who would do such a strange thing. However, eventually, in consequence of the continued importunity of mother and son, he consented.

It is impossible for any one to give a full and clear account of the wonderful changes which have taken place, and are still going on, in the secular and religious opinions and customs of the people of India, as the result of the spread of Western science and the English language. It presents a resemblance in the world of mind to that phenomenon which takes place daily in the material world, and which is called the dawn of the morning. For on the rising of the sun, the darkness of night flees away, and the real condition of the earth, which before was hidden, or only indistinct and illusory, becomes clear, distinct, and apparent. In like manner has the diffusion of the light of true science and true knowledge dispelled much of the darkness of ignorance; and its innumerable superstitions and absurd imaginations have begun to

take flight, like bats and owls and other unclean birds, to their hiding-places. And it is as impossible to hinder the progress of this beneficent and joyful light as it is to stop the course of the sun.

It was owing to the powerful working of all these causes that this new state of affairs in regard to religious questions commenced, and has now been going on for about fifty years, under the title of the Brahma Samaj. The original founder of this new religion or sect was Raja Ram Mohan Raya; and after him Babu Rajendra Nath Thakur was its chief leader; and now Babu Keshab Chandra Sen, a very able and distinguished man, more widely known than either of his predecessors, is at its head.¹ There are now, however, several such societies. Besides the Brahma Samaj, there are the Adi Samaj, the Sadharan Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and other societies, established in different parts of the country. In some respects these are all alike, but in others they differ. Some of their doctrines are the same as those of the Christian religion. They reject the pantheism of the Vedant, the religion of the Purans, all idol worship, idolatrous practices, and many of the distinctions of caste, and they worship in a spiritual manner one God, whom they also call 'Father.' In another respect they all agree, viz., although they speak with great adulation of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom chiefly all that is good in their doctrines was made known to the world, nevertheless they do

¹ He died January 8th, 1884.

not acknowledge His real authority, or the essential Divine teaching of His religion; neither do they believe in His priceless love and salvation, nor do they become His disciples.

When Rajendra went to the Government college, great discussion was going on regarding all these points, and he heard all the arguments on both sides, and spoke about them when he went home. When his father heard this he threatened him. But his mother listened to him attentively and asked him questions about it, and then, warning him not to tell his father, showed him the Bengalee New Testament which the missionary had given to his brother. The result of all this was that he lost all faith in his ancestral religion, but neither did he care very much about any religion. It is true he continued outwardly to observe the customary religious ceremonies, because otherwise his father and brother would have been displeased. But in his heart he believed them to be foolish; and his idea of the matter was that no one knew anything certainly about either God or eternity, and that there was no necessity to know anything about them either. In this way, though he differed in opinion from his brother, he maintained brotherly concord with him. Indeed, he had no disagreement at all with any one on the subject of religion.

This was the state of things between the brothers when Mahendra's son, Prasanna, became, as his uncle Rajendra had been, a student in one of the Calcutta colleges. Like him also he was fascinated with the

doctrines of the Brahma Samaj, and sometimes talked about them to his uncle and grandmother. But he was a much more zealous and earnest seeker after the truth than ever his uncle had been. For he thought that, in comparison with some certain information regarding the true religion, the worship of God, the future world, eternal life, and forgiveness of sin and salvation, there was nothing else worth thinking of. He therefore put forth all possible effort, searching in every direction if by any means he might find anywhere some true certain knowledge regarding these important matters. And it was while he was seeking in this way that he was introduced by a fellow-student to the Christian disciple, Ram Dayal, mentioned in the last chapter.

Ram Dayal had been taught in a mission-school, where the Christian Scriptures were regularly explained. But at first that teaching did not produce much effect upon his mind. For he was chiefly devoted to secular, physical science, and became a very skilful master of it; and in this way he was convinced that the religion of the Hindu Shastras was indefensible and unmeaning. This, however, was merely an intellectual conviction; to his spiritual necessities he remained utterly indifferent. He then paid some attention to the doctrines of the Brahma Samaj. After this he became dangerously ill, and was brought face to face with death. Then he began to be very anxious about eternity and salvation, and read and meditated on the Christian Scriptures with great earnestness and prayer, until at length he found peace of mind and spiritual life by

exercising true faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. He had a powerful and keen intelligence, an inquiring and patient mind, a simple and firm faith, and a loving heart. He loved his fellow-countrymen with a pure affection, was ever putting forth effort, and labour, and prayer for their salvation, and was truly devoted to the glory of his beloved Lord. When he saw the earnest desire and sincerity of Prasanna he was greatly drawn towards him, and was most anxious that in the religious conversation, the beginning of which was recorded in the last chapter, he might, by the grace and help of God, be able to give him proper guidance in the true way of salvation.





CHAPTER VI.

THE BRAHMA SAMAJ AND CHRISTIANITY.

AFTER Ram Dayal had placed the lamp and Bible on the table in his room, and sat down with Prasanna and Nawa, and had offered to God the prayer recorded at the end of the fourth chapter, Prasanna began the conversation with him as follows :—

‘I have heard, my friend, that at one time you, who are so studious and learned, paid great attention to the doctrines of the Brahma Samaj, so much so, that you thought of enrolling yourself among its members. But afterwards you changed your mind, and instead of joining the Brahma Samaj you became a Christian. What were the reasons which led you to such a result in so important a matter as religion ? If you will kindly explain these reasons I shall esteem it a favour.’

Ram Dayal answered, ‘A brief reply to this question is, that I did not find, nor could I find, either in my, old Hindu religion or in the doctrines of the Brahma Samaj, any adequate remedy for the sin

which is ingrained in my natural constitution ; and therefore it was impossible for my mind to rest satisfied in either of these systems. For until I obtain deliverance from the corruption of sin, what hope can I have of salvation ? But all this has been accomplished for sinful men by the Lord Jesus Christ, and is now offered for the acceptance of every one who will receive it as an adequate, authentic, certain, and most beneficial gift. Therefore, with great thankfulness to the Lord for His grace, I became His disciple.'

Prasanna said, 'I admit that the essential element of salvation is what you say, viz., deliverance from the disease of sin ; and also that the remedies appointed for this in the regulations of the Hindu Shastras, such as repeating the names of gods, austerities, bathing, charities, pilgrimages, etc., are altogether useless and vain. For these are all merely outward acts, and do not reach the heart, where the root of sin is. Then to change the heart of man, and to make the unclean clean, is beyond man's power. Only the power and grace of God can do this. But is not the grace and mercy of God quite sufficient ? Is not God our spiritual, heavenly Father ? and if we, His sinful children, repenting of our sins, turn to Him with sorrowful hearts and meditate upon Him, and ask His forgiveness, and beseech Him to change our hearts, will He not do even this for us ? According to the teaching of the Brahma Samaj, this is the proper way of salvation ; and if, when we trespass against our natural parents, we can obtain favour and forgiveness

from them, is it possible that the Father of our spirits can be more hard-hearted than they ?’

Ram Dayal replied, ‘That God is our heavenly Father, and has compassion upon us, and desires to save us sinners from our sin, there can be no doubt in the world. But we can only know this fact with certainty through the Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching of the Christian Scriptures. Where can we obtain certain, authentic knowledge of this glorious news apart from that Divine source ? Any indications of it that can be discovered in the course of nature are very few indeed. While, on the other hand, innumerable instances are manifest which clearly prove that the Divine law of nature is fixed and unchangeable, and that in it no arrangement is made for the forgiveness of transgression or the restoration of the fallen. All true ancient and modern science proves that the law of the physical universe remains unchanged and fixed ; and is it possible that the law established by God for the regulation of His spiritual and moral universe, which is infinitely superior to perishable material things, can be fickle and uncertain ? Our own minds give evidence on this subject, that sin, which is a breach of God’s spiritual law, and a subversion of the order of the spiritual universe, is an awfully flagrant evil, and deserves the severest punishment ; so that if its fitting results should not follow, it would be unnatural and unjust. If this is so, the dishonoured law cannot be vindicated, nor the corrupted nature of the sinner be restored, by mere repentance. Then, if you will reflect a little on earthly govern-

ments, it is self-evident that indiscriminate and unjust forgiveness can only result in anarchy and confusion. And is it possible there can be such subversion of order and misrule in the kingdom of God? In conclusion, with regard to this matter of sin, to argue from the mercy of God, and to trust to the dogma of the Brahma Samaj, that forgiveness and restoration are possible on mere repentance, is a conclusion so vain and unauthorized, that it is plainly in contradiction to the course of nature, the testimony of the heart, and the order of worldly governments. No wise man will ever leave the weighty matter of his salvation resting on so idle a fancy. In order to satisfy the mind on this point, some certain knowledge is essential, and such knowledge for sinful men can only be obtained through the Lord Jesus Christ.'

On this Prasanna's younger brother, Nawa, said, 'Why cannot man make atonement for his own sins? Are not atonement and restoration effected by meditation, repentance, and prayer?'

Prasanna himself replied to this by saying, 'The purport of Ram Dayal's argument is, that when man by sinning has become a rebel against his Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, deliverance and purification cannot be effected by any such poor and worthless remedies; and the proofs he has brought forward in support of it seem to be unanswerable.'

Then Ram Dayal said, 'True, that is my meaning; and besides this there is another thing, viz., is it possible that sinful man can, of himself and without Divine help, truly repent of and forsake his sins?'

Prasanna has already admitted that this is impossible.'

When Prasanna heard this, he remembered that as he was coming to the meeting he had also admitted" to his brother that the reason why his hopes had been disappointed was that he found himself committing sin every hour. Still, unable all at once to renounce his natural pride, he said to Ram Dayal, 'If we would carefully resist sin, we might escape from it.'

Then Ram Dayal replied, 'My dear friend, in saying this you appear to be under a serious misapprehension; and all the history of the world shows that the power of self-restoration does not exist in man. For it is only in those countries and races in which the Christian religion is diffused and predominant that this improvement and progress are visible. In all other races delusion and degeneracy have existed, and have grown worse and worse. And there are some reasons for this state of things which are very manifest, as,—

'1. In those races there is no established authentic rule, or standard of true and false, right and wrong actions and opinions; and for this reason all kinds of different customs and fancies, which are also at variance with one another, are current among them.

'2. Where any doctrine has been pretty generally received as a standard, still it has no real authority or force, because it has only come down by tradition, or from mouth to mouth, and there are few who understand or inquire about the real reason or meaning of it.

'3. What I said before about the Brahma Samaj is in like manner true of all religions of human inven-

tion, and of all the imaginary doctrines of human societies, viz., that whatever faults may be committed, or whatever departure there may be from the accepted standard, or whatever violation of the law of God, there is no adequate remedy for this to be found anywhere in any of them. Indeed, all the methods propounded are merely outward, inadequate, fruitless, and vain; for they do not touch the root of sin, and therefore can never eradicate it. Moreover, in most of these religions and doctrines, there is not even the sense or perception or consciousness of the awful malignity of sin. What hope then can there be of its remedy?

‘4. In the same way, in regard to them all, including the Brahma Samaj, I say that certain, authentic, true knowledge concerning God, and eternity, and salvation, and the real spiritual condition of man—past, present, or future—is not to be found in any of them; but only human imaginations and fancies and conjectures. And although among these some one statement or doctrine or other may accidentally be true, nevertheless no sufficient or suitable argument in proof of this is to be found in them anywhere; and thus all becomes unauthoritative, uncertain, unsettled, and inaccurate. In these circumstances, what wonder is it that among their disciples there is no sort of unity or consistency or agreement? Some observe caste, some idolatry, some established customs; some advocate female education, some pantheism, etc.; every one, just as it seems best to him, does or does not observe these things, and every one gives the same kind of reason for it—viz., our own intuition, which is really

no argument at all. Ought the matter of eternity and salvation to be left to such uncertain conjectures as these ?'

Prasanna said, 'When and how did such a view of these things enter your mind? and by what arguments did you at length find a satisfactory solution of them in Christianity?'

Ram Dayal replied, 'When by dangerous illness I was brought near to death, real anxiety concerning eternity arose in my mind, and I became thoroughly in earnest about salvation. At such a time mere fancies and conjectures are worthless. Then all that I had previously heard about the Lord Jesus Christ,—that He had come into the world as the incarnation of the Godhead; that, surrendering His life, He had died as an atonement for the sin of the world; that on the third day, triumphing over death, He had issued alive from the sepulchre; and that, before ascending to heaven, He had commanded His disciples to go into all the world and proclaim the good news, that whosoever believeth on Him shall obtain forgiveness of sin and eternal life,—all these things came back to my mind with a new power and meaning, and I felt certain that if on examination all these particulars should prove to be true and authentic, then, assuredly, this must be the true way of salvation. After I had recovered from my illness, I examined the matter with prayer and earnestness, and found it to be true. And ever since the time when I reposed the trust of my heart on the Lord, and, drawn by His priceless love, gave myself up to His service, I have had full satisfac-

tion and immoveable confidence in my heart that I shall obtain salvation through the merits of my Redeemer ; and, indeed, I am obtaining it daily. If you will prove this for yourself, you also will find it to be certainly true.'

These weighty and inspiring representations of Ram Dayal made a great impression on Prasanna's mind ; but no account of this can be given in this chapter. In the next, however, it will be related how this religious conversation ended.





CHAPTER VII.

RESULTS OF THE CONVERSATION. *

THE effect described in the last chapter, as produced by Ram Dayal's words upon Prasanna's mind, was not caused entirely by those which were printed in that chapter, for only a brief account could be given of the conversation; and the arguments in support of Christianity, both from testimony and from internal sources, could not even be considered. But when an intelligent, educated, honest man like Ram Dayal, who possesses strong faith, earnestly and affectionately expounds his faith to another person, if that person also has a religious and truthful mind, he cannot fail to be affected by it. For the saying of the Lord Jesus Christ regarding Himself applies in a measure also to His true disciples: 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice.'

While the conversation was still going on, Nawa reminded his brother that his father-in-law had pro-

promised to come and see them that evening. On hearing this, Prasanna asked Ram Dayal what o'clock it was, and when he heard it was nearly nine o'clock, both brothers arose to take affectionate leave and depart. But, first of all, Prasanna took Ram Dayal a little on one side and asked him kindly to lend him a Bible, as he wished to examine it carefully at home. Ram Dayal inquired with some surprise if he had not yet seen that sacred book, and whether he would prefer to have it in English or Bengalee. When Prasanna chose Bengalee, Ram Dayal gave it to him, saying, 'May God give you understanding and grace to read this in the right way, so that you may grasp its meaning correctly!' Both brothers then took their leave and set out on the way home.

As they went along, the mind of each was occupied with different thoughts and reflections. Prasanna's thoughts were of this character: Can Brahminism be true? Has it any fixed foundation? Is its teaching so uncertain? Do its followers observe caste and idolatry and other absurd customs and practices? Is there in it any adequate means of satisfying the mind on the important matter of the forgiveness of sin? Then, in regard to the teaching of Christianity about the atonement, what a strange thing it seems that God should lay the punishment of sinful men on an innocent being! Can it be true that the Son of God died instead of perishing sinners? Such love as this would certainly be beyond all human comprehension.

While Prasanna was silently indulging these reflections, Nawa, full of life and spirits, and forgetting

all about the conversation, was debating in his own mind the new style of Ram Dayal's dress. When they reached home, they saw that their evening meal had been ready for some time, and that their father, mother, and grandmother were in deep consultation. Their father Mahendra was the first to speak, saying, 'Do you know, Prasanna, that your father-in-law has been here just now, and that we have been considering what would be an auspicious time for completing your marriage arrangements?'

It should be known that the preliminary arrangements for Prasanna's marriage had been made five or six years before. This had all been done by his parents, and he had only seen his bride once or twice. Her name was Kamini, and she was then living in her father's house. She was a lovely girl of fourteen, tall and graceful, with beautiful features, large black eyes, a high forehead, long silken eyelashes, and the hair of her head so long that, when not bound up, it reached almost to the feet. Prasanna admired her beauty, but they were almost strangers to each other, and he had no expectation of finding in her that sympathy of mind which ought to exist between husband and wife; for he knew that, although she could read and write, she had been shut up all her life in her father's house, and knew nothing of anything beyond it. What harmony, then, of feeling or disposition could there be between them? Besides this, Kamini had strong faith in the religion of her fathers, and spent much of her time in reading the Mahabharat and Ramayan.* For all these reasons Prasanna was in-

different and listless about his marriage, and did not then say anything in reply to his father about his father-in-law's visit.

Seeing this, Mahendra again said to him, 'Where have you been all this long while to-night? Do you understand that I am very much displeased with you? Do you not know how to treat your father-in-law with respect, that you neglect him in this manner? Where have you been?'

Prasanna said, 'I wished to borrow a book from one of my friends, and I went to his house for that purpose.'

'That is not a straightforward answer,' said his father. 'Tell me who this friend of yours is, and what is the name of the book, and what has kept you three hours in bringing it?'

On hearing this Prasanna began to tremble. One reason was that he did not wish to lose his Bible, another that he was not willing to tell a lie. He was therefore anxious to give an answer which was true, and yet would not betray his secret. His father saw his confusion, and was more displeased than ever. Just then Nawa came to his brother's help by saying, 'Oh, father! the friend we went to see lives a long way from here, and it took a long time to go there and return.'

The father, however, again asked, 'Who is he?' Nawa replied, 'He was formerly a member of the Brahma Samaj, but he has now begun to read some Christian books, and rather likes them. We have been pointing out to him the absurd errors of that

religion, and while discussing these things the time slipped away without our knowing it.'

'Well,' said Mahendra, appeased by this timely interference of his favourite son, 'there was no great harm in that.'

Prasanna, however, was not satisfied with this conclusion of the business, because Nawa had concealed the real facts of the case, that they had gone for the purpose of conversation with a Christian. And he was just on the point of saying this to his father, when Nawa made a sign to him to keep quiet. But neither did this mend matters, for Mahendra had not forgotten what he had heard about the book, and, having doubts about it, he ordered his sons to bring it to him at once. When he saw it was the Christian Scriptures, he became excessively angry, dashed it on the ground, and ordered it to be thrown into the fire, where it was immediately burnt to ashes.

Poor Prasanna! his highly-prized volume destroyed, the pleasure he had anticipated that very night, in the secret perusal of its pages, vanished like a dream! The means of obtaining a knowledge of its truth and philosophy utterly gone, his hopes of learning more of a Saviour's love withered like the tender buds of a flower! This calamity was more than he could bear, and he burst into tears.

Seeing this, Mahendra became more angry than ever. Now he was really afraid that Prasanna's heart had got entangled in the Christian religion; and he reproached his sons so severely, that, without tasting their supper, they both retired to their own rooms.

Prasanna had observed that, while all the other members of the family had expressed their displeasure and disgust at his conduct, his grandmother had not blamed him at all, and only looked very sad at his disappointment. Just as they were leaving the room, she made a sign to him, and then coming to him with tears in her eyes, said to him quietly, 'Your father has been very unkind to you, Prasanna; but never mind, I will soon make amends to you for it.' Prasanna thanked and saluted her, and went to his own room.

When he was alone he began to think what his grandmother could have meant by what she said to him. Perhaps the dear creature would bring him some sweetmeats, or cook him some nice dish with her own hands. 'She, indeed, little thinks,' he reflected, 'that, whatever she may do, my loss can never be repaired by her or any one else.' At that time Prasanna did not know, or knowing did not believe, the consoling power of Christian faith,—that in every trouble and affliction God is our merciful Heavenly Father; that we can go to Him in prayer and tell Him our grief and sorrow and anxiety and pain, and be accepted, and obtain help and grace from Him,—or else he would certainly have at once opened his heart to his Heavenly Father, and have found comfort and strength in so doing. But although he had not this perfect faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he yet knew enough to feel that such a religion was essential to him, or else eternal death would befall him. And this was the reason why he prized so highly a book

which all the other members of his family regarded with contempt.

But Prasanna had formed a wrong judgment of his grandmother; for after a little while she came and knocked at his door, and when he opened it she gave him a book which she had hidden in her clothes, and whispering to him that he must not betray her, went away immediately. When Prasanna opened the book, and saw that it was an old Bengalee Gospel, he was amazed. It was the same book which, fifty years before, the missionary had given to his father at the Ganga Sagar Mela. That devoted servant of God, after labouring for many years for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ in India, had entered into the rest of heaven, and was now standing before the throne of God. But his prayers were, we may say, bound up with the book. These circumstances illustrate the truth of one of the sayings of the Bible: 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days.' Here is another of its sayings: 'If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.' There is still another saying of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was shown to be true in regard to Prasanna: 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' We hope to describe, hereafter, how Prasanna was eventually satisfied with the righteousness which he found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.





CHAPTER VIII.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

WHEN Prasanna began to read the New Testament in the solitude of his own room, he certainly 'hungered and thirsted after righteousness;' nevertheless, he was not 'satisfied' all at once. For there were some things in the book which he could not immediately understand. However there were others which he could understand at once. One thing seemed very plain to him,—that it was an extraordinary and wonderful book, holy and Divine in its character; and as long as his lamp kept burning he continued reading; then, after praying to God in some such manner as Ram Dayal had done, he lay down and went to sleep.

There were probably one or two in that family to whom sleep did not come as easily that night as it did to Prasanna. The father, Mahendra, especially was in a state of great anxiety as to how he could prevent his son from becoming a Christian. He had asked Kamini's father to come again the next day, in order to settle an auspicious time for Prasanna's marriage.

But at that time he did not know that his son's mind had been so far turned away from the religion of his fathers. Perhaps, now, his father-in-law would raise obstacles to the marriage altogether. 'Anyhow he will be sure to come,' thought Mahendra, 'and the matter cannot be concealed from him. It will be better, therefore, when he comes, to call my brother Rajendra, and the two boys Sarju and Chandra, and consult together thoroughly as to how this calamity may be best averted.'

Mahendra had a numerous family occupying his large house. There were his wife, his four sons, and his daughter Amritta; the wives of two of his sons and their three children; his mother and her sister; his father's sister and his own sister's daughter-in-law, who was a widow; and he supported them all. Then there were his brother Rajendra and his two sons living in the same house; their mother had died, and Rajendra had never married again. Including two or three other relatives, there were generally more than twenty altogether in the family, besides all their attendants. But though they all lived in the same house, they carried on their daily occupations separately. So that when Prasanna and Nawa, who had risen early and taken their morning meal, had gone as usual to school, and when Kamini's father, who was a wealthy Kulin Brahman, by name Dwarkanath, had come according to his promise, there was no difficulty in calling Rajendra, Sarju, and Chandra, and taking them into the 'dalan,' or large hall; for it was no unusual thing for such meetings to be held there for the purpose of mutual consultation.

When they had all assembled in the hall, and, having paid reverence to Ganesh, were sat down for consultation before the image of Kalee, Mahendra, turning towards Dwarkanath, thus addressed him, 'My dear sir, yesterday I invited you to come that we might fix a favourable time for Prasanna's marriage. But since then such things have taken place in regard to my son, and his condition appears to me to be such, that it seems necessary for us first of all to consult together about this. Somehow his mind has got corrupted in regard to the holy religion of his fathers. And I am very much afraid that, unless we adopt some means to restore him, he will perhaps be ruined altogether by becoming a Christian, and so bring disgrace and contempt upon us all. What pain and grief it costs me to speak in this way of my own son, you will in some measure be able to understand. For some little time I have observed that he has been negligent in the performance of his daily devotions. But the youths who are like this are not few in these days, and for this reason I did not think much about it. But yesterday he took his younger brother to some wretched Christian, and brought their Shastras away with him; and when I ordered the cursed book to be burned he burst into tears. For this reason I am very anxious to know what we ought to do to save him.'

On hearing this Dwarkanath replied, 'I am very much distressed by hearing what you say, for such a thought never came into my mind as that my son-in-law could be ruined in this way, and it seems to me quite intolerable. So that, if the marriage promise had

not been given, I could never have dreamed of giving my consent to such a marriage for my beloved daughter. Is it possible for a Kulin Brahman like me to have any connection with such people? Never! But the arrangement has been made, and it is difficult now to set it aside. And I hope that your son's mind has not been corrupted to the extent you imagine. Cannot his uncle or his brothers throw some light on this mystery?'

Then Sarju said, 'Yes, I have known for some time what Prasanna was coming to. And I have frequently warned him, and also told father about it. But who can tell what is to become of our holy religion in these days? It terrifies me to think what calamities the gods may send upon us in consequence of what is taking place. Our country and our religion are being ruined by the spread of the Christian religion and Western science; and all the young fellows who learn English, although they outwardly call themselves Hindus, do not in their hearts really believe our Shastras; they have no faith in the religion of their fathers, and are separate from us in all religious customs and opinions. A curse upon the Christians who are bringing all this ruin upon us! To put a stop to it now, however, is difficult. I can say nothing about other people; but in my opinion such decided measures should be adopted towards Prasanna as will bring him immediately to repentance, and effectually cure him of all such folly in the future.'

Then his uncle Rajendra said, 'It is not surprising that Sarju thinks as he does, because he knows nothing

of European science or the English language ; so how can he know anything of their character or worth ? If what he says is true—that it is on account of the diffusion of that science that our religion is being destroyed—what kind of religion can ours be ? The worldly benefits derived from that science are obvious to all ; and the fruits of our religion too are not to be hidden. Let every one judge between them. But crying out “ Alas ! alas ! ” will not stop the course of the sun, or the progress of the world, or the triumph of true science. I, too, have known for some time a little about the state of Prasanna’s mind, because he has spoken to me about it. At one time I was in the same condition ; but I have not yet become a Christian, nor is it likely, in my opinion, that Prasanna will become one. But if any coercion or violence, such as Sarju speaks of, is used towards him, I cannot answer for what he will do. You will never save him in that way. Sarju ought to refute his opinions by argument ; and I am sure he would listen. Or else we must adopt some other expedient for diverting his mind and making him forget these religious matters. I will very gladly help in the matter to the best of my power. For this disgrace and reproach to us all, will be a calamity for me too.’

Then Chandra said, ‘ What uncle says is true. Nothing can be done by violence. Do something or other to divert altogether Prasanna’s mind. Make him happy with amusements, and pleasure, and sport, and he will soon become a different person.’

On hearing this, Prasanna’s father-in-law, Dwar-

kanath, said, ' It appears to me that there is wisdom in what was said by my friend Rajendra ; that the best plan will be to save Prasanna by diverting his mind, if possible, from thinking on these subjects. But Prasanna is of a religious nature and disposition, and you will never change his mind by mere amusements. A plan has just now occurred to me, and if you will give me leave, I will mention it. I think that in order to save Prasanna it will be better for him to leave this place for a time and go somewhere else ; and if at the same time the splendour and glory of our ancient, mighty, and holy religion could be shown to him, and the self-evident proofs in support of it be pointed out to him, probably his former faith might be re-established with new power. Now, with a view to this, a pilgrimage to holy Kashi, a sight of its splendour, and hearing the teaching of its renowned and learned pundits, will, in my opinion, be the most excellent plan of all. And if Rajendra would take his nephew with him to Kashi, and amuse his mind on the way, and affectionately point out to him the necessity of following the religion of his fathers, I am full of hope that he will be saved. In my youth, I went there once myself, and the picture of the place is, so to speak, imprinted on my mind, and the sound of its conches and bells is still ringing in my ears. And though I acknowledge that the state of things is now very different in this country, and a sort of infidelity and atheism is diffused in the very air, still, if the mind of any young man is to be kept in the religion of his fathers, nothing will help to

keep him in it like a pilgrimage to Benares, and a sight of the earnestness and devotion of its thousands and tens of thousands of worshippers.'

This proposal of Dwarkanath commended itself to all the members of the family council, and was especially agreeable to Mahendra. He cheerfully promised to bear the cost of the pilgrimage, whatever it might be; and Rajendra agreed to arrange and complete the pilgrimage with Prasanna. The time for Prasanna's marriage was deferred until after the pilgrimage; and Rajendra was requested to tell Prasanna of the arrangements that had just been decided on.

As soon as Prasanna returned home from school his uncle sent for him, and told him they were to go to Benares. When he first heard this he did not quite like it; but at length he consented to it for various reasons. One was, that he did not wish to cause his father more displeasure; another, that his marriage would in this way be postponed; a third, that if any arguments could be found anywhere in defence of Hinduism, they ought to be found in Benares. Now it would be seen what they are like. Besides, it is a good thing to see the world, and his uncle was very kind to him. In short, he went with him on a pilgrimage to Kashi.



CHAPTER IX.

THE VISIT TO BENARES.



OF all Indian cities which are places of pilgrimage, Benares is the most celebrated. According to the Shastras and the opinions and practices of the people of India, it is described in the most glowing terms, as golden, holy, and the gate of heaven; its very soil, water, and air are said to be destructive of sin and a means of obtaining salvation. It is true that these wonderful excellences do not appear to the ordinary observer, but probably some semblance of them is visible to the eyes of the devout worshipper. The city contains about 1500 temples, 20,000 Brahmans, 200,000 inhabitants, and 500,000 idols. When so many appliances of the Hindu faith exist in that one spot, what wonder is it that the followers of that faith fix their minds upon Benares? Accordingly, innumerable pilgrims, hearing of its fame, flock to it from all parts of India.

When Rajendra and Prasanna and their attendant, travelling by rail, arrived at the Mogul Serai station, they had to change their train, and as it moved along

the city of Benares gradually came into view. First of all they saw on the left hand two tall towers or minarets of a mosque, which had been built by a Muhammadan Emperor on the site of an old Hindu temple. When they reached the bank of the Ganges, looking across the river, they beheld the city upon the opposite bank, about three miles long, with beautiful, broad, and lofty flights of steps ascending from the river to the top of the high bank, while above them cupolas, temples, and palaces rose proudly into view. The sun was just then rising, and its beams fell glancing on the golden pinnacles of the temples and on the sparkling waves of the river. There were multitudes of men and women thronging the ghats, intent on bathing and devotion, and worshipping the sun; and the conches of the priests and the bells of the temples filled all the air with sound.

Rajendra had a friend living in Benares, who, when he heard they were coming there on pilgrimage, invited them to accept his hospitality during their stay; and, when they had crossed the Ganges by the bridge of boats at Rajghat, Rajendra saw his friend, who was named Nilkamal, coming to meet and welcome them. He lived in Bengali Tola, at the southern end of the city. In consequence of a long bend of the Ganges at that point, it flows from south to north. The northern boundary of the city is the Barna Sangam, or confluence of the Barna with the Ganges, near Rajghat; and the southern boundary is the Assi Sangam. The part of the city where the Bengali Tola is situated is called Kedar. Nilkamal

had taken a boat from there and had come down to Rajghat, intending to take his guests by way of the river to his own house. When they and their servant with the luggage had taken their places in his boat, the three friends sat down on the deck to rest, and in this way they could see beautifully, as they passed up the river, all the ghats and the temples with the innumerable worshippers who thronged them.

Nilkamal was a Calcutta Babu, who had made a great deal of money by merchandise, and as he had sincere faith in the religion of his fathers, he felt sure that whatever sins he might have committed in accumulating his wealth, would be forgiven by his living and dying in Benares. He had therefore bought one of the large houses on the banks of the Ganges, and brought all his family to live in it. Like the family of Mahendra, he was a Shaiva, or worshipper of Shiv, and he was always most regular in the performance of his devotions. But he had no knowledge of the Shastras, and was not fond of religious discussion. He knew all the temples and ghats of Benares well, and all the legends connected with them, and when the boat had been loosed from Rajghat, and was slowly ascending the river to Assi Sangam, he pointed out every celebrated spot and place of pilgrimage to his guests, especially those known as the Five Shrines: viz., reckoning backwards, 5. Barna Sangam; 4. Panch Ganga—at which ghat there is said to be a confluence of five rivers; 3. Manikarnika; 2. Dasaswamedh; 1. Assi Sangam. And as Nilkamal pointed out these ghats, he gave the legend of each, and said there was

so much merit and virtue connected with each one of these five shrines that any pilgrim who visited even one of them with a fixed mind was sure of salvation. Indeed, the efficacious virtue of Benares is so wonderful, that this is said to be true of each one of its temples, and ghats, and wells. According to this account, if any one were to perform all these pilgrimages in a proper manner, he ought to accumulate some thousands of salvations in his own hands, and then, if he pleased, might make merchandise of these articles, and acquire great wealth in the world by the sale of them. At least, when Prasanna heard Nilkamal giving such wonderful accounts, thoughts like these passed through his mind. But he did not speak of them to others; he simply reflected deeply on all that he saw and heard.

The chief temple in Bengali Tola is Kedareshwar, which is built on the banks of the river; and a beautiful ghat ascends from the water's edge to the temple. When the boat arrived at the ghat, Nilkamal ordered it to be put to, for his house was close by; then leaving the boat they all ascended by the ghat to his house, and went into a large upper room, like a hall, which was open to the river, and there they sat down to rest.

Nilkamal was in the habit of performing his daily devotions in the Kedareshwar temple; he was a client or disciple of its chief priest, and supplied him with money to be distributed to the mendicants who daily assembled there, and he regarded the chief priest, whose name was Vishwanath, as his friend. For this reason he had already told him that his two friends

were coming from Calcutta on a pilgrimage to Benares, and had asked him to appoint some one to show them all the places most worth seeing. Accordingly, Vishwanath had chosen one of the Ganga putras, a man named Durga Dās, for this work ; and when he heard that Nilkamal's guests had arrived, he went to the house to meet them, and, after giving them his blessing and asking after their welfare, thus commenced a conversation :

‘ You, gentlemen, who have come to holy Kashi in order to remove your sins, may be quite sure that you will accomplish your object more effectually here than anywhere else. For this city is the special dwelling-place of the great god Shiv, who is the special destroyer of sin ; this river Ganges falls from his locks, and for this reason its waters are specially holy and purifying. In short, you have only to perform the worship of the Lord of Kedar with strong faith and a fixed mind, and you will certainly obtain salvation from all sin.’

Rajendra replied, ‘ I have heard that many of the pundits of Benares believe in the atheistic philosophical system of the sage Kapil, and for this reason have no faith in the conventional observances of the common people. Is this true ? ’

Vishwanath rejoined, ‘ Yes, there is some truth in it ; for certain wise and learned pundits do accept that system ; and, if the truth must be told, it is very difficult to refute the arguments in support of it. But there are other pundits who accept the Vedant or pantheistic system, according to which there is no

such thing as vice or virtue—there is nothing but *maya* or illusion. But these are the speculations and secret doctrines of the initiated. For the common people the popular customary road is appointed, and is most fitting. We observe the conventional forms in order to satisfy them, as well as to obtain our own livelihood. For this reason I have asked Durga Das, one of the sons of the Ganges, to show you all the chief temples and shrines; and whenever you like you have only to call him by one of your servants, and he will immediately be in attendance.'

Rajendra thanked him, and expressed a wish that he would kindly tell them at what shrines it was most important for them to worship.

Vishwanath then told them of Visheshwar, the Five Shrines, Gouri Kund, Gyan Bapi, Panch Kosi, and the names of many other places and shrines; and also said that if Rajendra and Prasanna would like to worship in the temple of Kedareswar, which was close at hand, and would do so with settled mind and strong faith, and present their offerings there, they would in that way gain the benefits of attending all the other shrines. But if they wished, Durga Das would show them all the other places; then, giving them his blessing, he departed.

When Prasanna had heard the opinions and observed the manners of Vishwanath, he doubted whether he, the priest of a temple, whose chief work was to guide the devotions of his disciples, had himself any true faith whatever in such worship; and he wondered whether, if he believed the atheistical philosophy, he

was not an atheist. But when he told his doubts to his uncle he got no satisfactory answer from him. His uncle only told him it was not right in such awful matters to trust to his own reason ; on the contrary, he should consider himself a poor, imperfect, ignorant creature, and walk humbly in the way of his forefathers. Otherwise nothing but confusion would be the result.

After this they spent several days in visiting many holy places, under the guidance of Durga Das. They performed their devotions, and presented their offerings, and had much conversation with their guide, as well as with several other worshippers ; they asked many questions of religious teachers and learned men, and heard all sorts of astonishing and wonderful stories and many contradictory doctrines. When they saw the earnestness and devotion of the worshippers, it was evident to them that many of the common people, like Nilkamal, had sincere faith in these religious observances, and hoped in this way to obtain deliverance from the consequences of their evil conduct. These, however, were generally uneducated and ignorant persons. There were some learned and clever pundits who, like Vishwanath, took advantage of the ignorance and the superstitious fears of the common people for their own objects. There were others again who, like many of the Ganga putras, had no faith whatever in God or religion, and paid no regard to either truth or falsehood, vice or virtue, but threw a cloak over their own wicked lives, and earned their living by assisting the worship of sincere believers, whilst they themselves

were inflamed by lust and greed and avarice. In short, Rajendra and Prasanna ascertained that, whatever outward ceremonial purity may be ascribed to Benares, nevertheless such spiritual, moral, habitual, practical impurity is committed every moment in that city, as would rarely be found in any other.

There were, indeed, two or three other circumstances of a different kind connected with Benares, such as the carrying on of large English schools, the establishment of churches of native Christians here and there, and the preaching of the Gospel in the city by Christian missionaries, and its acceptance by some learned men. But Rajendra and Prasanna did not hear anything of these things, and, if they had heard, probably they would not have thought much about them; at that time that was not their object. For in that city the ceremonies of the Hindu religion were predominant, and they were observed with great pomp and splendour. But in all that pomp and splendour Prasanna could find nothing of the true way of salvation, nor could his mind derive from it any satisfaction whatever.





CHAPTER X.

MATTERS OF HEART AND HOME.

WHEN Rajendra and Prasanna were returning by rail to Calcutta, their fellow-travellers could tell from their appearance and manner that they were thoughtful, disappointed, and sad. For they remained sitting or reclining in silence, and evidently did not wish to converse with any one. They were both quite convinced that no satisfactory argument could be found in support of Hinduism, but as yet no new faith had grown up in place of the old one. In this respect they were both alike, in another they were different. For Rajendra was endeavouring to satisfy his desolate heart with worldly things; but Prasanna could not do this. He had come to know enough of the Lord Jesus Christ to raise the hope that he might find satisfaction in Him. But it was very difficult for him to acquire full and satisfying knowledge of the Lord, because all his family placed obstacles in the way of his endeavours. For this reason he resolved that he would, as far as possible, keep his wishes secret, and say nothing to any of his

family about them ; read his New Testament only in private, and do all he could to please his father and brothers ; have no religious discussion with any one ; and if his marriage was arranged he would accept it. Perhaps he would be more independent if he were married. He would also continue to pray in his heart to God, his Heavenly Father, to guide him into the true light ; and when the opportunity offered he would have religious conversation with Ram Dayal and other Christians ; and, God willing, he would in due time obtain release.

On reaching home Rajendra gave all the family full particulars of their journey and pilgrimage, and also such an account of Prasanna as led them to regard him as having escaped all danger of becoming a Christian. Prasanna, indeed, had said nothing either to his uncle or to any one else to justify such a conclusion. The only difference was that he no longer found fault with the ceremonial observances of Hinduism, and did not dispute in defence of his own opinions. But all the members of the family wished to consider him as rescued ; and Rajendra had told them not to speak to Prasanna on the subject of religion, but to drop it altogether, and he would of himself soon be all right ; whereas, if they teased him about it he would perhaps be again obstinate. Thus the other members of the family knew nothing whatever of the thoughts that were passing through his mind ; and as he was very regular in going to school and studying his lessons, all anxiety about him was entirely dispelled.

After a little while, his father-in-law, Dwarkanath, hearing good accounts of him, came to pay the family a visit, and, in consultation with Mahendra, Rajendra, and others, after casting Prasanna's horoscope, fixed a propitious time for the marriage ceremony. From that time great confusion and excitement prevailed in the whole household. The female members especially were engaged in making great preparations to welcome the bride, and all were delighted at the prospect. Prasanna's mother and grandmother were rejoiced with the hope of receiving a new daughter-in-law; for the marriage of a son or daughter is always thought a most happy event in Hindu families. The two sisters-in-law, Saudamini and Nistarini, already in the family, were very much pleased, because they would have another to talk with. Nawa, knowing that his new sister could read and write, was delighted, because there are few women in Hindu households who possess these accomplishments; and as he was younger than Prasanna, and was at liberty to converse with her, he looked forward to great pleasure in doing this, and in teaching her. Although Sarju and Chandra, being older than Prasanna, might not converse with her, and were not even permitted to see her face, they nevertheless took part in the joy of the household. Mahendra was glad because Kamini was a devoted Hindu, and accustomed to read the Mahabharat and Ramayan; and he hoped that by her means Prasanna's faith in the Hindu Shastras and ceremonies might be strengthened. But it was for this very reason Prasanna was apprehensive that there might be some

discord between them on the subject of religion. This thought sometimes saddened him, but he put it away, and resolved to teach his wife, hoping she would gradually become a suitable companion for him. In regard to the forms and ceremonies of the marriage he was generally quite indifferent.

On the day of the marriage, Prasanna went to the house of his father-in-law, in order to bring his bride to his father's house. When he arrived he found that already a great many female guests were assembled in the women's apartments, for the sound of their shouting and laughter was heard outside. It is not necessary to describe here all the marriage customs which are observed by the Hindus, nor would it be of much benefit. Indeed, it would not be right to do so, for there are things in them not proper to be spoken or written about. This much, however, must be said, that Prasanna was placed alone in a separate apartment, and after a little while his bride Kamini came to him. Her long hair had been carefully dressed and ornamented with vermillion, and her whole person was covered with jewels. There were three kinds of bracelets on her wrists, a gold chain and a necklace of pearls on her neck, a crown of gold and jewels on her head, ornaments of gold in her nose and ears, and among them a flower, each stamen of which was a gem; above her elbow were armlets of gold, and on her feet silver ornaments. The expression of her countenance was soft and sweet, and her voice mild and gentle. But when she entered the room, after practising the shameless rites which are customary on

those occasions, she looked pale and weary, and cast a timid glance at her future lord. One thing seems to be plainly proved by these evil customs,—that the seclusion of women is not the best or most effectual way to secure their purity of mind. And when, after observing them, the marriage was concluded, the disgust and hatred which Prasanna had previously felt towards the customary observances of Hinduism were greatly increased, and he felt quite certain that such a religion could never have come from a holy God.

When all the marriage ceremonies were over, Dwarkanath gave a grand entertainment to all his female guests. Then the bride and bridegroom took their leave. The bride was placed privately, so that no one might see her, in a covered palki; and the bearers carried her away. She came to her father-in-law's house, to live in stricter seclusion and confinement than at her own father's. But all the family, especially Prasanna's mother, grandmother, sister, and sisters-in-law, received her most affectionately, and showed her all the kindness they could, in order to make her contented and happy.

It may have been two or three months after the wedding, that one day Sarju's wife, Saudamini, was sitting listlessly in the verandah, and her child Gopal was sleeping on the ground near her, when Kamini came out of her apartment with the Ramayan in her hand, and sat down, leaning her back against the railing of the verandah, and began to chant part of that celebrated poem. Upon this Saudamini said to her. 'Oh, Kamini! the sight of that book reminds me

that Gopal's father told me to learn the worship of Shiv from you. You perform it every day, and he wishes me to do the same.'

Kamini said, 'You had better learn to read the verses for yourself, sister. Shall I teach you? You will then be able to do all the worship prescribed in the Shastras.'

'Oh, dear, no, Kamini!' said Saudamini; 'if I were to learn to read, Gopal's father would be very angry with me. How could I take care of the child? And if I were to act in this way, contrary to all the customs of my forefathers, some great calamity would certainly come upon us.'

Kamini smiled and said, 'Very well, sister; I will teach you in the same way as I do my parrot; when shall we begin?'

'Now, if you like,' Saudamini replied; 'the child is asleep. But I will call Nistarini, she too ought to learn it.'

But Chandra's wife, Nistarini, had been very much displeased with Kamini that morning, because Mahendra, thinking Kamini was sad and wanted to see her mother, had tried to please her by giving her a beautiful new dress. Nistarini called her sadness affectation, and, because she herself had not received a dress like her, threw out hints that she was an artful, deceitful woman, and was so angry with her father-in-law as to apply to him the Bengalee proverb, 'In this house, seemingly, it is the child who cries that gets the rice.' In this way the quarrel had risen high, and was only quieted by the authority of the

grandmother. This outward reconciliation had not taken place more than an hour or so, when Saudamini called Nistarini to become Kamini's pupil, and it is no wonder that that did not improve matters at all.

When Nistarini had heard what Saudamini said, she cried out, 'I think you must all have gone mad. You, too, sister! What is the meaning of your falling at this girl's feet? Why, she only came here a day or two ago, and she has already turned our father-in-law against us, so that he only gives sweet words to us, while she gets all the presents. To learn the worship of Shiv from her, indeed! Well, sister, I tell you it would be much better for us if she were away, and her teaching too. What with her *pujas* and her reading, she is so conceited that there is no bearing her. But she will learn wisdom in time. Wait a little, till she tries her hand at cooking, then she will find that a text does not make the best spice for a curry, or else her husband will soon find it out for her, and then what will happen? And when her children come it will be still worse. Who knows? perhaps she will try to put her baby to sleep by singing the Ramayan, or repeating the name of Shiv!'

'For shame, Nistarini!' said Saudamini; 'see, you have made poor Kamini cry! How can you do so? Besides, you are insulting the 'gods. You had better go away now, and keep quiet until you have forgotten all about this quarrel.'

Nistarini went away to her own room, muttering to herself that if her elder sister, who had always been her friend, was now going to turn against her, she

could not stand it. What could she do but run away, or jump into a well, or take poison ?

But Saudamini did not believe this, nor turn against her. She was affectionate and gentle, and bore patiently Nistarini's temper, and always endeavoured to keep peace and concord. So, wiping Kamini's eyes, she said to her, 'Come, Kamini, never mind her unkind words ; she will herself be sorry for them to-morrow. Come now and teach me. I am all attention ; for I really wish to please Gopal's father by learning to perform that *pūja*.' And Kamini, comforted by her sister's kindness, cheerfully did as she wished.

Now, what account shall we give to the readers of this history, of Kamini's instructions to her sister about the worship of Shiv ? If they know it, it is needless. If they do not know it, it would be no benefit to teach them. Indeed, it would assuredly be an injury to them. It is to be hoped that Kamini did not understand the popular meaning of it. And when any one reflects on its unseemliness and foolishness, it appears very wonderful that any intelligent being should regard it as the worship and service of God. It is not surprising that Saudamini thought it difficult, and concluded it would take a great many days to commit to memory so many Sanskrit verses. But Kamini agreed to teach her a lesson every day. Just then, however, Prasanna came out of his room and made a sign to Kamini to come and give him his dinner, and she immediately accompanied him for the purpose.



CHAPTER XI.

PRASANNA AND KAMINI.

THE relations which were soon established between Prasanna and Kamini were much more affectionate than he had ever expected; for although she was without any proper education, she had a sweet disposition and a sharp intelligence, and quickly understood, with little teaching, the things he most wished her to learn. Kamini, too, loved her husband dearly, and looked up to him as a model of perfection. But there was one thing that distressed him, viz., that Kamini was devotedly attached to idolatry. Though in worldly matters she possessed an unusually clear judgment and good sense, in religion she appeared to him to be altogether astray. No doctrine, however horrible it might be, if found in the Shastras, caused her the least alarm. The most senseless and foolish ceremonies raised in her mind no feeling of contempt. The absurdity and unutterable impurity of the legends produced in her no doubt or disgust. Indeed, she regarded them all as holy, religious teaching. When Prasanna saw this he

could not understand it, for he did not know that it is by means of such human inventions, under the name of religion, that the evil spirit enfeebles and leads astray the minds of men, and shuts them up in thick darkness. This was Kamini's condition; but the Spirit of all truth had begun to shine gradually in Prasanna's heart.

The fact is, Prasanna had become almost a Christian. Before the pilgrimage to Benares he had thought that perhaps there might be some argument in support of the religion of his fathers which he had not yet heard, and by which his own faith in it might be re-established with new force. But when he saw that neither his father, nor his brothers, nor his uncle, nor his father-in-law, nor his friend Nilkamal, nor the priest Vishwanath, nor the Ganga putra, Durga Das, nor any teacher or learned man of Benares, brought any argument, or even spoke of doing so, but instead of this they had all become angry, and threatened, or used hard language, or spoke only of worldly disgrace and trouble, he was sure they had no proper argument to bring; and that was the reason why, instead of bringing proof, they treated him so badly. In proportion, also, as he became better acquainted with the real facts, and doctrines, and customs, and ceremonies of Hinduism, he was more and more convinced that it never could have come from the true and holy God, his Heavenly Father, and could not possibly be the true way of salvation.

But although his faith in his old religion was altogether overthrown, he had not yet attained to full

faith in the religion of Christ. There were still some doubts in his mind which could not be removed all at once. In consequence, however, of his marriage he had now more freedom than before, and could, whenever he pleased, read in his own room the New Testament his grandmother had given him; he could go to his Christian friend, Ram Dayal, for religious conversation, and no one asked him where he had been or whence he came. So that he could tell all his doubts and difficulties unreservedly to his friend, and find in his comments the meaning and explanation of them; just as he had before learned from him the uncertainty and insufficiency of the teaching of the Brahma Samaj.

Ram Dayal explained to him that his difficulties were of two kinds. The first had reference not to the Christian religion only, but to the general condition of the world, and to all the other religions in it; and Prasanna's doubts were chiefly of this kind. Then there were others, which applied only to the special teaching or facts of Christianity. Of the first kind were—(1) What was the origin of evil or sin? (2) How is such injustice as appears in the earthly condition of man possible? (3) What power has man to escape from this state of sin and injustice? (4) When the state of man in this world is such, what will it be in the next? (5) If the state of man is such, for what purpose did God create him? and what is the nature of God Himself? (6) As man himself cannot explain these mysteries, even supposing some knowledge of them were given by God, how can

it be proved to be authentic and true? (7) If such true authentic knowledge can be obtained from God, why has not all the human race obtained it?

When Prasanna unreservedly expressed these doubts to Ram Dayal, he did not blame him on account of them. Indeed, he acknowledged that many thoughtful Hindus, when first detached from their old faith, fall for a time into such doubts as these; and if any one is not sincere, it is no wonder if, sinking into the mire of them, he should utterly perish. Ram Dayal also pointed out to him that the root and essence of them all is the same—viz., sin, or moral evil, the origin of which was such a difficulty to him. Regarding the existence of sin there could be no doubt whatever; but how it originated is not explained in any religion, while in some its very existence is denied; and in none, except the religion of Christ, is any adequate remedy for it to be found. The superiority of Christianity over all other religions, and its truth too, are made manifest in these two ways: that it contains a rational account of the entrance of sin into the world, and together with this gives authentic information of the provision made by God of an adequate, sufficient, and effectual remedy for it.

Then, in regard to the facts of Christianity and the teaching of Scripture, about which Prasanna felt doubts, they were connected chiefly with that very remedy for sin. For instance, the union of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Divine nature or Godhead; and the Father sending the Son into the world, and the Son becoming incarnate, and taking a human form

and being sacrificed as an atonement for the sin of the world, and the regeneration of men by the Holy Spirit, and so on. Ram Dayal pointed out that it is not at all surprising if, on such great and awful subjects, there should be found in a Divine revelation some things which are beyond the limits of man's narrow understanding. But the essential question is, Who is it that teaches these things? and what is the authority of the teacher? and how can his authority be established and authenticated?

'Now it is self-evident,' said Ram Dayal, 'that the teacher of these things was the Lord Jesus Christ; and in the establishment of His authority to do this, He said one thing which every one can put to the test. He frequently said, "I shall be put to death for the sin of the world, and I shall rise again the third day, and then you will know that all My teaching is true." Now the victory of the Lord over death, and His issuing forth alive from the tomb, is a fact, the belief of which is dependent upon evidence and examination; and the existing arguments in support of it are well known to those acquainted with history to be irrefutable. If they are not, it ought not to be difficult to overthrow them. But no one has as yet overthrown them. It is through the influence of this Divine and wonderful fact that the whole religious condition of the world has been changing from that time, and is still being changed, and the spiritual renewal of innumerable human beings has been going on, and is still going on in all countries.'

The faith of Prasanna in the Lord Jesus Christ gained constantly increasing strength from these ex-

planations of Ram Dayal. But there was one practical matter regarding which he still had some doubt. It is the command of the Lord, that whosoever believes in Him shall become His disciple by being baptized with water. But a Hindu who does this is at once cast off by all his relatives, who will have no further intercourse with him. It was this that hindered Prasanna from obeying this command; for it seemed to him too miserable to be thus cut off from all his family, and especially from his dearly beloved wife. He was thinking about this when he called Kamini to give him his dinner, for he had made an appointment to meet Ram Dayal afterwards, in order to consider this matter with him.

Since his marriage, Prasanna had, as opportunity offered, given Kamini some religious teaching according to his knowledge, and had endeavoured, without mentioning its name, to draw her mind gradually towards the Christian religion. He had felt the unutterable and priceless love of the Lord Jesus Christ to have such a powerful and blessed influence upon his own mind, that he earnestly desired Kamini to taste it, and to share its boundless peace too. Kamini was ready to listen to his words; but she did not understand his object, and he had to be very careful lest Kamini, seeing what he was aiming at, should get alarmed, and not heed what he said, or perhaps even speak to others about it. When Kamini, in compliance with his call, came into their room, he said to her, 'Come, let us sit down together and take some food. Don't be afraid. There is no harm

in it; and I want to have some conversation with you.'

Kamini was assuredly very much delighted when Prasanna in this way treated his wife like a suitable companion, and on this occasion she came, and smilingly sat down beside him; when he said to her, 'Did you ever hear, dear, of any other religion in the world but your own?'

Kamini replied, 'Yes, I have heard of the Muhammadan religion.'

'Yes, there is that,' Prasanna said; 'and there is another, one of the books of which I have just been reading. It teaches that all men are sinners.'

'Well,' answered Kamini, 'I suppose that is true. For who is there who does not commit sin? It is a good thing that by the favour of the *deotas* we can do works of merit too, and so enter the heaven of Indra.'

'But according to this book,' said Prasanna, 'there is in point of fact no such thing as works of merit.'

'Well, to be sure! what kind of teaching is that?' exclaimed Kamini. 'No such thing as works of merit! Is there no merit in giving alms, feeding Brahmans, digging tanks, or performing austerities?'

Prasanna said, 'This book teaches that whatever good works are possible to us, it is our duty to perform them. So to speak, it is a debt which we owe, and what merit can there be in paying it?'

'But how can such teaching be beneficial?' asked Kamini. 'For if there is no merit in good works, who will perform them? and how can such people hope to go to heaven?'



‘Through the merits of another,’ said Prasanna.

‘Well, that is a very wonderful thing,’ replied Kamini, ‘and it seems a very easy thing too. But if all are sinners, who can have merit enough to be a Saviour?’

‘There is an account given,’ said Prasanna, ‘of a Saviour who is an incarnation of the Godhead, and who is absolutely free from sin, and can therefore be the Saviour of sinners.’

‘The meaning of that is,’ said Kamini, ‘that He forgives their sins. Well, our gods do that too. But how can God need to become incarnate? Is not His command alone sufficient for everything? And what need can there be of His merit? or what benefit can it be to any human being?’

Prasanna said, ‘How can a holy and righteous God forgive sin by His mere command? If there was no punishment of sin, what sinner would ever forsake his sins? And, on the other hand, if fitting punishment is given to sinners, who can be saved? In this great difficulty there is only one adequate remedy apparent, viz., that some one who is free from sin, and full of merit, should stand in the place of the sinner, and bear the punishment due to the sinner instead of him, and that the fruits of his merit should be given to the sinner. In this way the sinner might escape punishment, and no injury be done to the Divine justice.’

‘How could there be no injury?’ asked Kamini; ‘if the sinner escapes, and the innocent is punished, is not this great injustice and oppression?’

Prasanna replied, 'If some mediator of his own free will were to do this in behalf of sinners, what oppression would there be in that? If my brother were thrown into prison for debt, and I went to the court and of my own will paid his debt, and the judge took it from me and set my brother free, would he do any injustice in this? Or if, to save you from some great danger, I threw myself into that danger, and, while I saved you, lost my own life, would there be any injustice in this?'

'Oh, no!' said Kamini, 'there would be no injustice whatever in this. But it would show great love indeed. May you never do anything of the kind for my sake! That would be surpassing and wonderful love; and the very thought of your being exposed to such danger makes me tremble.'

'Well, dear, listen to me,' Prasanna said; 'according to this book, God has done this very thing in order to save us sinners. But I cannot tell you more about it now, for I must go to meet a friend. But think about what you have heard.'

Saying this Prasanna went away.





CHAPTER XII.

FAMILY DISCORD AND SIGNS OF COMING TROUBLE.

NO indications appeared to show whether or no Prasanna's words had taken effect on Kamini's heart, for just as he went away she heard a noise proceeding from the other side of the house, and went in that direction in order to ascertain its cause. When there, she discovered that the sound came from Nistarini's room, and she was on the point of going in, but when she saw that Chandra Kumar was there she hid her face, and concealed herself in a neighbouring room, where she could, without being seen, hear what was going on. In this way she came to know that Chandra was giving his wife a good beating, because his mother had found fault with him about her. The truth is, that Mahendra's wife was a quarrelsome, disagreeable, and selfish woman, and when Chandra came home, weary with work and heat, she told him in a provoking way that his wife had insulted Kamini, and unless he punished her he would be under her thumb and very contemptible. But she had only a selfish object in saying this,

because Nistarini was an orphan, while Kamini's father was a man of consequence, who, if he heard that his daughter was not happy in her father-in-law's house, might remove her to his own. When Chandra heard his mother's taunts he could not bear them, and without further inquiry took off his shoe and began to beat Nistarini with it unmercifully, saying at the same time, so that his mother might hear, 'You are in this way to learn perfectly not to quarrel with a favourite. Don't you know that your younger sister-in-law is much too clever, and good, and holy for you to be a fit companion for her? Don't you know that you are not fit to put your foot on the same ground with her? Be so good as to keep to yourself in future; and don't offend the righteous Kamini with your impertinence.'

Such scenes as these take place, from time to time, in the families of all countries, because all mankind have been corrupted by universal original sin, and instead of unselfish Divine love, self-seeking and envy control the minds of all. Undoubtedly, however, this state of things is more apparent among those who do not pay proper respect to the female sex, nor instruct them according to the law of God. Because in this way the original qualities of woman, which are excellent by nature, are repressed by ignorance and inferiority, until they are corrupted and perverted. If any one is treated like an animal, will he not soon become like one? If nothing is done to improve and teach any one, will he not quickly be ruined? And will not he who is not employed in some suitable, good, and useful occupation, certainly busy himself,

through indolence and mischievousness, with unworthy and injurious thoughts and pursuits? This is the chief reason why such scenes occur in Hindu households, and especially between mother and daughters-in-law. And the best remedy for ~~this~~ sad state of things may be found in a command of the Christian Scriptures: 'Husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.'

From her place of concealment Kamini heard all that passed, and was very sorry indeed on account of it. And when Chandra had gone away she went to Nistarini, and said how grieved she felt because of her suffering, and begged they might be friends again. Gradually the clouds passed away from Nistarini's countenance, and at length she said, with a smile, 'Well, I think it was very foolish in me to be so angry all about a dress.' In this way concord and friendship were restored between them, and Nistarini, forgetting her husband's unkindness, began to play the Bengalee game of 'Mogul Pathan' with Kamini. The reason why she was so quickly satisfied may be found in the fact that this kind of disrespect and dishonour is no uncommon thing among Hindu women. They say that even the slave comes at length to love his chains, and this mental degradation is the clearest proof of his real slavery. However, but for Kamini's affectionate kindness, perhaps Nistarini would not have been so quickly comforted.

While Kamini was doing this good work, her hus-

band was having a conversation with his Christian friend, Ram Dayal, on the result of which Kamini's happiness very much depended. For some time Prasanna had acknowledged that whoever trusts for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ ought, in accordance with His command, to receive baptism in His name, and become His disciple openly before all. And he was very desirous to put away his present secrecy and make a distinct profession of his faith. He had spoken of this to Ram Dayal, and Ram Dayal had mentioned it two or three times to the foreign missionary who was his friend; and it was by the advice of them both, as well as in accordance with his own wish, he had concluded that if there was the slightest hope of Kamini's joining him in this important step, he ought to postpone it for a time on her account, and to endeavour in every way to lead her mind towards the Christian faith. One reason of this was that he loved his wife very dearly, and it seemed a dreadful thing to him to be separated from her. Then, through his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, a Divine, unselfish love had sprung up in his heart, in consequence of which he was extremely desirous that Kamini should share with him that peace-giving love and salvation. For whoever loves the Lord will, assuredly, like Him, earnestly desire the salvation of all, and especially of those who are dearest to them.

But to act in this manner in the family, and especially towards his wife, became every day more and more difficult and impossible to Prasanna. For he could not now, as formerly, employ deception; but

without deceit how could he hide his object from them all? It also seemed to him to be a kind of hypocrisy to continue outwardly a Hindu, while in heart he was a Christian, and he began to doubt whether by acting in this way he was not betraying his Lord. But from all the conversation he had been able to have with Kamini, and her replies to his questions, he could see no grounds for hope that at present she would do as he wished; and yet how could he be separated from her? He was in this difficulty of mind when he left Kamini at home, and went to consult with Ram Dayal. On arriving there, and being received kindly by his friend, he explained his anxiety to him as follows:

‘My dear friend, you know very well that my mind has for some time reposed its trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I know that such a believer ought to be baptized in the name of the Lord. And I myself have been ready to do this; but I have also wished that, if possible, my dear wife might accompany me in this. With this hope I have had conversation with her, which has, however, convinced me that this hope of mine is, under present circumstances, impossible. Now, will you kindly tell me what you think I ought to do?’

„ In reply to this Ram Dayal asked Prasanna, ‘Have you spoken plainly to your wife on this important matter? or have you only hinted a few words to her about it?’

Prasanna said, ‘How could I speak plainly about it? In the whole family there is not one person who would listen to such words from my lips. When I

was first inquiring about these things, all except my grandmother opposed me with great harshness. If I were now to speak openly about them, I don't know what they would do. But I have no doubt that my father-in-law would forcibly take away my wife from me, and my father and brothers would in some way or other confine me. They appear to have determined not to care in the least about what is true or what is false, but on one point they are unanimous,—that they will not allow any discussion about it; and my wife seems to agree with them in this.'

Ram Dayal replied, 'What you tell me reminds me of a saying of Paul, the apostle of our Lord, that "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The natural condition of the minds of us all is the same. It is only by the Lord's grace that we are now different; and the same grace is available for them too. We ought constantly to pray for this on their behalf. But to point out clearly and certainly what you ought to do in these circumstances is not easy. There can be no doubt that it is your duty to be baptized in the name of the Lord; but there is no command about the particular time or circumstances in which this must be done. In delaying to do this for the sake of your wife, I think you have done well. But if you now feel sure that you ought not to delay any longer, I cannot deny this. The Lord will certainly guide and help those who truly believe in Him. If you do this, you will be separated from all your

family, and from your wife, in consequence of their prejudice and enmity; and the pain and suffering involved in this will chiefly be yours, for their suffering will only increase yours. If you should accept all this bitter pain, because you love the Lord with sincere and true heart, you will assuredly have special grace given to you by Him, and we His disciples will do all we can to help you. But the decision of this important matter rests emphatically with yourself in prayer and communion with the Lord.'

While Ram Dayal was uttering these words Prasanna fixed his eyes stedfastly upon him, and listened with the most earnest attention. Then he exclaimed, 'What an unhappy being I am, that all my family should so oppress me! I only wish to act according to the command of God, and to walk in the true way of His salvation, and they neither seek salvation themselves nor let me do it either. They neither refute my words, nor reply to my arguments, nor even listen to them. They only throw difficulties in my way, and employ themselves in destroying the truth, and treating the Saviour Jesus Christ with contempt, and strive that both they and I should be cast into hell. I am certain that, except the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no Saviour either for them or for me. "But when I believe on Him and wish to act accordingly, they wish to entangle me in hypocritical and deceitful practices. How is it possible for me to continue to live among them? But how can I separate myself from them, and especially from my wife? I am in great difficulty. O Lord Jesus Christ, do Thou help and

guide me, or else I shall be lost !' Then, turning towards Ram Dayal, he said, 'My dear friend, do you offer a few words of prayer with me to the Lord in my behalf?' Then they both knelt down and worshipped the Lord. Ram Dayal prayed most earnestly to Him for Prasanna; that He would help and guide him. After this Prasanna's courage revived a little, and, taking leave of Ram Dayal, he went home.

Meanwhile Kamini, having finished her game with Nistarini, went into her own room and began to prepare the evening meal for Prasanna; but as it was long before he returned she became drowsy and went to sleep. When he came home she woke up, lit his lamp, and placed his meal before him. She saw that he looked anxious and distressed, and seemed much troubled by every little attention; at length he said to her, 'Do not take any trouble about me; leave the lamp and retire to rest; I shall sit up for some time reading.' He had often done so, and for this reason Kamini did not think anything about it then, and went to sleep. But afterwards she remembered that, whether in a dream or before she slept, she saw her husband looking at her with the tenderest affection, and heard him say in the saddest voice, 'God bless you, my most beloved wife!'



CHAPTER XIII.

THE DISTRACTION AND MADNESS OF THE HOUSEHOLD.

WHEN Kamini arose in the morning she saw that Prasanna was not in the room; and remembering how strange his manner had been on the previous evening, she became anxious and alarmed about what could have happened to her husband. She knew that no one loved him so affectionately as his grandmother, and for this reason she went at once in search of her, in order to tell her troubles; and they both searched everywhere in the family, but no trace of him could be found. He was not anywhere in the house, nor had any one seen him going out. It was quite possible, indeed, that he might have gone out very early to breathe the fresh morning air; but as the day advanced, and no Prasanna came, the whole family became alarmed and confounded, and each person began, according to his fancy, to imagine in his own mind and to make all sorts of conjectures as to what had become of him.

Mahendra's aged aunt thought he had been carried away and hidden somewhere by some fairy or ghost,

and although the others did not believe this, nevertheless the very mention of it made the hearts of some of them tremble more than ever. Sarju mentally concluded that he had been drowned while bathing ; but, not to alarm his mother, he mentioned his thought to no one but Chandra. The latter, however, considered it probable that Prasanna had fallen ill somewhere, because once before, when working, he had been attacked with hæmoptysis, and perhaps this had now happened to him again, and he might be lying somewhere prostrate and helpless, unable to send word to his family. In this way they went on increasing each other's alarm and distraction, and no one knew what had happened or was going to happen, or what ought to be done.

But the state of poor Kamini was more grievous than that of any one else. She was sure that some mysterious and awful calamity had befallen her, and she fell at her mother-in-law's feet beseeching her to send messengers in every direction in search of her son, and crying out in a heart-breaking voice, ' Alas ! unhappy creature that I am ! why cannot I go in search of him myself ? I know it would be contrary to our customs for me to do this ; but what bad customs ours are, and what pain they cause me now, such as I never even thought of ? Oh, my dear and honoured husband ! what shall I do if you do not come back ? Why did not you who are my life take your slave with you ? In your company the shadow of a tree would be a beautiful palace to me, and the wild berries which bats eat the most delicious food.

But without you this pleasant home is more desolate to me than the wilderness.' Then, dashing her head against the cold stone, she continued, 'As the chakor, enamoured of the moon, feeds on its beams, so does my soul hunger and thirst for your society. Indeed, you must come back, for I can have no joy or rest without you. You must come back, O lord of my life! jewel of my soul, you must return, or I shall die!'

It is not surprising that Prasanna's family should be distressed at his disappearance; and assuredly the grief of Kamini must have been especially great. And although perhaps she uttered such language more or less in accordance with custom, nevertheless her grief was undoubtedly very real and severe. Different races express such sorrow in different ways. Some utter their pain violently, like the fury of a sudden storm, and then, like a storm, are soon calm and quiet again. Others restrain and conceal their grief, and generally the suffering of such persons is more severe and abiding. Kamini's expressions were such as it was thought fit to use on the loss of a husband, and so she used them; and, moved by her grief and their own anxiety, Prasanna's three brothers—Sarju, Chandra, and Nawa—went out in search of him.

They hunted in every place where Prasanna was in the habit of going,—the houses of their neighbours and acquaintances, and every school and market-place, the roads, bathing-places, and gardens in all directions; but he was not to be found anywhere; nor could they hear any news of him. At length it occurred to Nawa

that it would not be surprising if he had gone to the Christian, Ram Dayal. Upon this the three brothers went to his house ; and there they heard that Prasanna had indeed been there, but was not there then, for he had gone to a foreign Christian missionary, and it was his intention to become a Christian himself. This intelligence seemed to his brothers as though a thunder-bolt had struck them, and for some time they were stunned and bewildered. As soon as they had recovered their senses a little, they went straight home to give the dreadful tidings.

On arriving there they told all they had heard to Mahendra and the rest of the family. When they heard it they were carried away by a whirlwind of excitement, and men and women with one voice began to cry aloud, and exclaim, and lament, so that if any stranger had seen and heard them he would certainly have supposed that some one had just died there. The anger of the father and mother was the most terrible of all. They began to curse their son and their own destiny, and to say, 'If he had been carried away by a demon, or drowned, or had died in any other way, it would have been better than this misery. The honour of the family is gone ; our son is sold into the hands of strangers, our daughter-in-law is a widow, our caste is ruined, our gods are dishonoured ! How could such a curse fall upon us ? Alas ! alas ! what shall we do ?' And all Kamini's love for her husband was in an instant changed to cruel hate, and she began to call the 'jewel of her soul' a vile apostate, a heartless monster, a hateful heretic.

When this storm had a little subsided, Sarju said to his father and brothers, 'What ought we to do now? for he has not yet become a Christian by baptism, and if we quickly employ means and make some effort we may perhaps even now be able to save him from that calamity. But if we delay there will be ~~no~~ remedy.'

To this they all agreed, and they were also of one mind on another point,—that if he could be saved from the water of baptism, it would be all right. Whatever else besides this he might have done, it could be atoned for: if he had eaten forbidden food, this might be forgiven by feeding Brahmans; his desire to become a Christian might also be pardoned. In short, in whatever way it could be done, by force or fraud, by kind word or by threatening, by persuasion, by false promises, by violence, in some way or other he must be brought home. And when he has come home he must be kept there. If there is no other way of doing it, he must be made an idiot by opium or some other stupefying drug, for that would be better than becoming a Christian,—and an idiot son is better than a daughter.

Perhaps the readers of this affecting history, when they read this account, may feel some doubt whether the relations of Prasanna, when they talked in this way, and took counsel together, had not already become idiots and madmen, and altogether hard-hearted and impious too; and if such conduct was in accordance with the religion of the Hindu Shastras, what other argument is wanted to prove that it is not Divine? For whether Christianity be true or not, there can be no doubt

about this,—that it was both the right and the duty of Prasanna to exercise the judgment and conscience which God had given him in finding out the right will and the true religion of God. And he had done this with an upright and true heart, and in consequence of this he had sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and was certain that that was the only way of salvation. And this judgment of his was undoubtedly authentic and correct, and he was able to bring proofs in support of his statements, and he wished to explain them to all his family, that they also might obtain faith and salvation. But they hardened their hearts, and would not allow even the thought to enter them that perhaps what Prasanna said might be true. Indeed, they were so fascinated by the pride of caste and their religious customs, that they endeavoured to persecute and ruin him. But this conduct was only in accordance with the prophetic saying of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.’ At length the result of their consultation was that Mahendra and his three remaining sons, in the fever of this madness, went to the house of the foreign missionary in search of Prasanna.



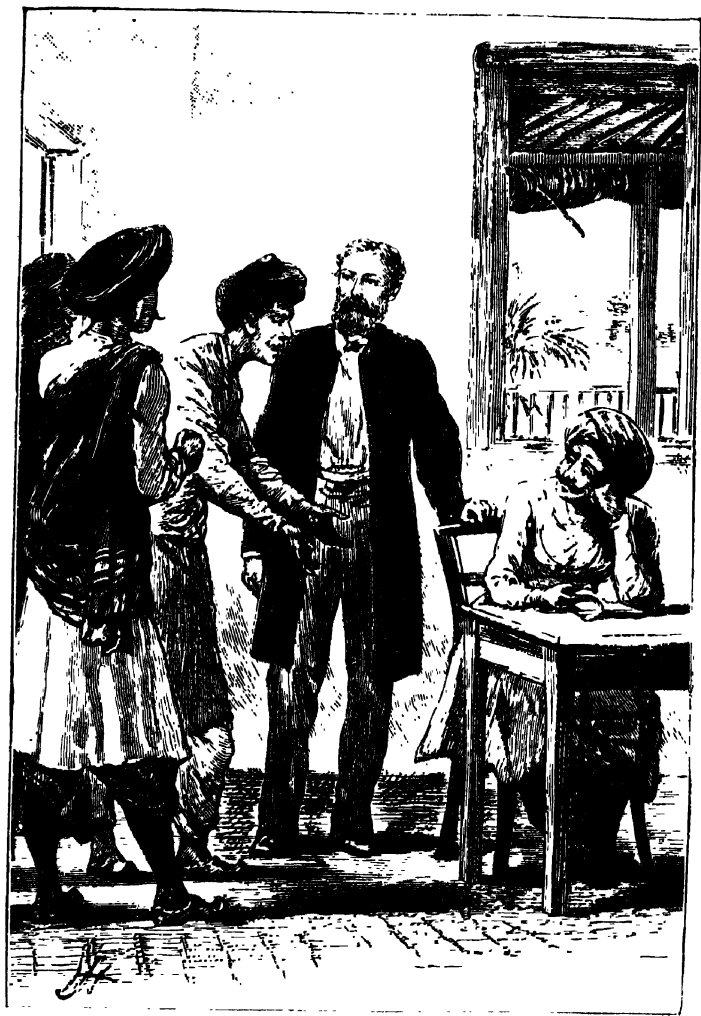
CHAPTER XIV.

A PAINFUL DISCUSSION.

THE foreign missionary in whose house Prasanna had taken refuge had resided for several years in the neighbourhood of Calcutta, and was the principal of a large mission-school there. Hundreds of Bengalee youths were taught in that school, and received regular instruction in the facts of Christianity. It is not surprising that several of them acknowledged in their hearts the beauty, holiness, and truth of the history; but those who acted in accordance with this conviction were rare. For such as did so, separate rooms like barracks were built near the school, and in those the Christian students lived. The missionary's house also was built in the same compound; and several times students who desired to know the true way of salvation had sought that knowledge from the missionary, and had sometimes taken refuge in his house. In this way the missionary had varied experience in such cases, and from frequent practice had acquired all kinds of knowledge regarding them. He was also a man of a

mild, patient, and thoughtful disposition, and it was not his wont to be hasty in such important matters. For this reason he had warned Ram Dayal to be very careful in testing Prasanna's faith, in order to see whether or not it was genuine; and had told him how necessary it was to point out plainly to him the suffering, danger, and disgrace which would come to himself and his family if he were baptized, and the earthly pain he would have to bear as a Christian, and what he ought to do in regard to the honour due to his parents. From the first the missionary had explained all these things to Prasanna through Ram Dayal; and when Prasanna came to his house he was himself explaining them to him more fully, just at the time that Mahendra and his other sons arrived there in search of Prasanna.

Coming as they did in the heat of their anger, they were at first rather violent and rude, and, going inside the house, called out in a loud voice, 'Where is Prasanna? We must speak to him. Bring him here. Who has misled and entrapped him?' And when the missionary, hearing their outcry, came and asked them, 'What's the matter? what do you want?' they began to reproach him, saying, 'It is you who have led him astray and ruined him by your promises of a beautiful house, and a European wife, and a fine carriage.' The missionary, when he heard their abusive language, was not angered by it, but bore it gently and patiently; and, remembering what great suffering these circumstances must cause to the affectionate heart of a father, he courteously led Mahendra



and his sons to the room in which Prasanna was sitting. Prasanna had heard their voices, and well knew how painful an interview with them would be. This was the reason why marks of pain and anxiety appeared in his countenance, and he supported his head with his hand.

Mahendra thought it better, in the first instance, to allure him by affectionate gentleness, and said to him, 'My boy, why have you left us in this way? You really must come back with us. While you are away, our house is a house of mourning; your mother has neither eaten nor drunk since you left, nor will she till you return. She will certainly die. You ought to consider this.'

Prasanna replied, 'I would return with pleasure, but I cannot forsake my religion.'

Mahendra asked, 'What religion is that?' Then getting very angry, he continued, 'I will tell you what it is—to dishonour your father, to kill your mother with grief, to abandon your wife, whom you have just promised to love, to love foreigners better than your own brothers, to eat with doms and chamars—that is what the Christian religion is. And in return for all you forsake what do you get? The pleasure of tasting beef! Oh, Prasanna! how could you have fallen so low? Besides, the promises of these foreigners will never be fulfilled; they are very deceitful. You will get no European wife, for white women despise black men.'

Prasanna was deeply grieved to hear such foolish words from the lips of his father, and said in reply,

‘Oh, father, don’t you know me better than that? Do you think me such a contemptible wretch? No one has ever promised me such things as you say. I want no other wife than my beautiful Kamini. I have no wish, whatever to taste beef. I was drawn towards Christianity by quite a different force. The salvation of my soul, the forgiveness of my sins, everlasting life,—these are the things which I need. I can obtain all these priceless blessings through the Lord Jesus Christ freely and without price. But I gain only one worldly benefit, viz., the peace of mind which comes from doing one’s duty, and knowing that God is my Father, and that I am walking in His way. Moreover, I know very well that, instead of worldly comfort, I must lose my father and mother and my share of the patrimony. This is my portion. Henceforth I shall be regarded as a sinful outcast by my family and friends. The lowest of my servants would not eat food with me; my wife will reject me. I must bid farewell to my comfortable home and all its abundance, and work to earn my daily living; and until I can do this I must depend on the liberality of my Christian friends for the necessaries of life.’

When Prasanna’s elder brother Sarju heard him say this, he said, ‘As you can describe so correctly the calamities which follow on embracing this cursed religion, why do you continue so obstinate in your course? It makes me tremble to think of it. Surely the dreadful wrath of the holy gods will fall on your head.’

Upon this his second brother Chandra disputed the

remarks of Sarju, and began a contention with him regarding the Hindu religion and the new European learning. Mahendra also interposed, sometimes disputing, sometimes supporting the statement of one or the other, in order to stop their contention; but in point of fact he only increased it. At length Chandra spoke to Prasanna as follows :

‘ You know, Prasanna, very well, and I also know, that there is one God, and that His true worship is spiritual. All men are alike in His sight. He is indifferent about religious forms. In Hinduism and Christianity the spiritual object is everything. In the one, sacrifice, incense, charity, offerings; in the other, kneeling, hymns of praise, prayer, worship—are alike futile. Only the adoration of the heart reaches God. We can perform this adoration in retirement, in our own hearts, according to our own tastes, without violating the wishes of our parents. In short, Prasanna, you come with us; for you cannot confute my argument; therefore come home with us.’

Prasanna replied, ‘ My dear brother, if I could only make you understand one half the pain it causes me to refuse your invitation, I should be satisfied. The religion you have just described is the religion of those who do not believe in any Divine revelation. But I am not such a person. I am a Christian. The true revelation of God is with me, and in it I find such teaching as this: that the Lord Jesus Christ said, “ I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Also, “ He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

“And whoso is ashamed of Me, of him will I be ashamed.” And the Lord commands that whoever believes in Him is to be baptized in His name. Now tell me whether it is right to obey the word of God or the word of man?’

Mahendra then fell upon his neck, and in an agony of tears cried out, ‘Oh, my son! How can that be the word of God in which it is commanded to renounce your father when he is old and grey-headed, to kill him with grief, and to embitter his last days with sorrow?’

In reply Prasanna said, ‘No, no; that is not the command of God, nor do I wish to do it. It is Hinduism which causes all this cruelty and wickedness. Why may not I as a Christian continue to live in my paternal home? what is the reason? why, if I continue to live there, cannot I live in accordance with the commands of God and the true and firm conviction of my own conscience? How should I, by so doing, transgress against or injure any one? You know very well that this hostility does not originate with Christianity, which is emphatically the religion of love. Whatever opposes it, that it is which causes hostility.’

Just then the missionary entered the room, and, when he understood the purport of the conversation, he said to Mahendra and his sons, that if they would let Prasanna live with them after he had been baptized, they would gradually come to know, by observing his character and conduct, how excellent the Christian religion is, and would gladly receive not only Pras-

anna himself, but his friends and brethren also, and think it an honour to do so. But this proposal appeared to Mahendra and his sons so extraordinary and alarming, that at first they were simply bewildered and overwhelmed by it, and found it difficult to believe that such an idea could ever enter into any one's mind. Afterwards they became very angry, and began a contention with the missionary, particulars of which will be given in another chapter.





CHAPTER XV.

THE PRIDE OF CASTE.

WHEN the missionary used to Mahendra and his sons the language reported in the last chapter, he knew very well that it would not be acceptable to them. Not that he wished to give them pain. Indeed, when he heard that Prasanna had spoken to them about himself and his friends taking food in Mahendra's house, he had explained to him that he should not speak in that way, because they could not bear it. At the same time he both wished and hoped that the bigotry and enmity of their conduct might in some degree be made apparent to them. And for this reason only he had spoken of Prasanna continuing to live in their house.

When Mahendra heard this from the missionary also, he could no longer contain himself, and cried out, 'Hear what he says, he is mocking us!' Then turning to the missionary, he said, 'If you continue to detain my son, I will certainly apply to Government for justice. This is great oppression. What can I do? With the help of Government I will again recover my

son. Do you not know that you have deliberately led astray my son, who is under age? and you are now detaining him, which no one but myself has any right to do!’

Upon this Prasanna said, ‘Oh, father, how can you say that? I am not under age. Two years ago I was sixteen, and I am now of full age.’

‘Hold your tongue, you liar!’ exclaimed Mahendra. ‘Haven’t I got your horoscope, and will not that show that my words are true?’

The missionary then said, ‘My friend, when you first came to my house you said that you had nourished your son for eighteen years, and that he had now turned out very ungrateful. How then can you now say that he is under age? And you know that, instead of detaining him here by force, I am extremely desirous that he should continue to live always in your house as a Christian.’

Upon this Prasanna again entreated his father, saying, ‘If you will kindly give me leave to live and act according to my own religion, I shall be delighted to return home, and will do all in my power to fulfil in every way my duty to you and to my mother.’

Then the missionary again said to Mahendra, ‘Is not what your son says fair and right, Babu? I also beseech you to accept his request.’

There is no knowing what Mahendra would have said at that time, but his elder son Sarju prevented his saying anything by calling out angrily, ‘What! shall our family and our fair fame be defiled and disgraced for ever? You know that we cannot receive a

Christian into our house, and we will not ; for this reason you are making sport of us.'

The missionary gently replied to him in this manner : ' Indeed it is not so ; I am not making sport of you. This kind of discussion is extremely painful to me. If I only thought of my own comfort, why should I not say, " Take Prasanna, and go in peace " ? But I cannot say this, because it would be doing wrong to Prasanna ; and you are the cause of this wrong. For you wish to use force and injustice towards him in a matter of religion, and conscience, and salvation. It is his right and his duty to do the will of God according to his own judgment and conscience, and you will not let him do this : neither in the family, nor separate from it, will you let him do so. And what is the cause of this ? Has natural affection for him been altogether extinguished in your minds ? Has an earthly father the right or power to set aside the command of a Heavenly Father, *i.e.* God ? or forcibly to bring into subjection, in the matter of religion, the mind of any one which God has created ? and why do you wish to do this ? What thing, or power, or creature can that be that wishes in this way to break asunder the relationship which God has established ? What sort of religion is that which practises or causes this impiety ? I had hoped that, through the influence of your fatherly affection and love, Prasanna would perhaps obtain from you some such concession as this, that you might say to him, " Your way of serving God is very different from mine ; but I am not the lord of your conscience. Therefore

I will not turn you out of the family, nor will I use coercion towards you." Why do you not say that?'

Mahendra then cried out, 'Oh, sir! sir! how can I ever say such a thing as that? If I were to say it, I should be driven from the society of all my friends; no one would eat with me. If I were to give utterance to such a thought, no one would keep company with me. It can never be. It would be better for me to die than this, for death is better than dishonour!'

The missionary replied, 'Well, Babu, I am extremely sorry for you. I wish with my whole heart that I could help you. But what power have I? The real cause of this horrible separation is the Hindu religion. If my son were to renounce Christianity, I am taught by that very religion to love him and cherish him, to be gentle towards him, and with all tender affection to persuade and win him back to the path of holiness and truth. What kind of teaching and command in opposition to this the Hindu religion gives, you know very well. Now let your conscience and your heart judge in which religion justice and mercy are to be found.'

Upon this Mahendra began to weep, and great tears rolled down his aged cheeks, and he cried out, 'This grief was written on my forehead, and I can only bear it; but, oh, sir!' (then turning to the missionary, he went on) 'is there no way of deliverance possible for me? none whatever? Though all your words may be true, nevertheless have pity on my weakness, and persuade my son not to leave his aged father. I entreat

you to do this, and the blessing of all the family will be upon you and your household.'

Then the missionary began to weep too, and in reply to Mahendra he said, 'My friend, your son is perfectly independent and free to act according to his own wish; but it is impossible for me to persuade him to reject Christianity and embrace Hinduism.'

Sarju and Chandra said to their father, 'Come along, father! You will do no good by staying here; do not imagine that this person will help us. Everybody knows that for every new convert he baptizes he receives 1000 Rs. What missionary will easily let such a sum slip? Come; we will get justice elsewhere.'

Without replying to this false and irritating charge, the missionary requested that Prasanna might be left alone. Then the two brothers in great anger dragged their father out of the house; but Nawa remained behind, and going to Prasanna whispered to him, 'Oh, brother, do not leave me to perish in Hinduism. I know that it is false; give me some Christian teaching, and then let us both become Christians together.'

Prasanna replied, 'My dearest brother, if anything would make me delay in becoming a Christian disciple, it would be to bring you with me to the feet of Jesus. I will give you a Bible, but I cannot go with you.'

All that Nawa had said had been instigated by his clever brother Sarju, who hoped to ensnare Prasanna by this argument. But when Prasanna refused, Nawa turned to go away in despair. Prasanna, seeing this, detained him a little, saying, 'I want to speak another word to you, Nawa; give my fond love to my dearest

wife, and say to her, if I have grieved her at all, "Pray forgive me, because I am quite helpless in this matter." I am now a disciple of that holy religion of which I gave her some description in my last sweet conversation with her; and do you beseech her to join me, and to accept my God as her God. She will never repent doing this. That God will be her guide unto death, and will afterwards receive her into everlasting glory.'

Nawa scarcely heard the last words of his brother, and was gone in a moment, and Prasanna and the missionary were left alone. Then the excitement of his feeling, being freed from restraint, burst forth, and weeping he exclaimed, 'O Lord God! Thou knowest what agony this meeting has caused me! Blessed be Thy name that Thou hast sustained me.'

When Mahendra and his sons arrived at their home, all the family surrounded them and eagerly asked them what had happened; and, when they heard it, they were all confounded. First of all, Prasanna's mother cried out, 'I gave him birth, and he now refuses to come to me!' and fell senseless on the floor. At first Kamini's grief was more silent. With the pride of a suffering woman, she wished to conceal her inward pain, but desire for revenge had also existence in her heart, and she said, 'He has made me a widow in the freshness of my youth, and I will have my revenge: the gods are holy and just, and assuredly they will punish him.'

Upon this Nawa said, 'No, it is not so; he has not made you a widow at all; he wishes you to join him, and he has sent this message by me.' Then he went

on satirically to say, 'Of course, sister, you will go to him; and then we shall soon hear that you have been very happy eating in company with men, and that your food has been the flesh of the cow and the hog, and that you have drunk intoxicating liquor.'

Kamini angrily replied, 'Hold your tongue, Nawa; but tell me truly, did your brother have the boldness to dare to call me to him?'

Nawa said, 'Yes, of course he did. I have told you his very words.'

Then Kamini answered, 'Tell him that instead of love I send him cruel hatred, and instead of forgiveness, revenge and indignation; tell him that it is my religion which is holy and Divine, and his is disgusting and bestial. Tell him that I loathe and despise him, and as surely as the sun rises in the heavens, so surely will I every day denounce and curse his detested name before my god.'

Mahendra, on hearing such angry words, said sadly to Kamini, 'Gently, gently, daughter; he is your husband, at any rate. Do not curse him; have a little patience.' Then, with a little smile on his countenance, he said, 'Have patience; we shall get him again, and yet be happy.'

That evening there were great consternation and distraction in the household; for they were all maddened by the pride of caste, and filled with all sorts of foolish fears, and thought that Prasanna by becoming a Christian had seriously injured and disgraced them. If anybody had asked them what wicked thing Prasanna had done: had he committed

theft, or adultery, or murder, or any other kind of abominable act or sin? they would have said, 'No, no, he has done nothing of that kind; but he has become a Christian.' Then if you were to ask, 'What harm has he done in becoming a Christian? is a Christian a ghost, or a devil, or a scoundrel, or an atheist, or a criminal?' they would reply, 'Because he has become a Christian, people will mock us, and will say that we are unclean on his account.' Then if you were to say to them, 'If what people say is true, will you please to explain this; but if it is not true, why do you think about it?' owing to their madness they are not able even to listen to you, but continue wailing and weeping: and this was the condition of the household of Mahendra. At one moment, in order to propitiate some angry god, they were presenting incense, gifts, and offerings, and the presiding priest was telling them, 'Now there are good omens, now it will be all right.' Then, remembering the firmness of Prasanna's mind, their hope was destroyed, and they were sure that he would never again return to the Hindu religion. That night passed in this way.

There was a very different state of things in the house of the missionary on that evening. They had received a summons from the Government court requiring the missionary to bring with him Prasanna, whom he had taken away by force, and to appear before the magistrate. Upon this the missionary and his wife and Prasanna met together in a private room, sat down by a table, and, opening the Bible, read its Divine teaching. The words of the blessed promises

of God which are contained in that book were explained by the missionary, and both he and his wife told Prasanna how they had tested those words for many years, and found them all to be true; and now their comfort, and strength, and joy, their safety and their life, were all derived from them. Prasanna found in their affectionate sympathy a sweet, holy, loving joy, such as he had never before even thought of. At length they all three kneeled down, and with the help of the Holy Spirit prayed to God their Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ their Saviour, that on the morrow Prasanna might be able in the presence of all to give clear and straightforward evidence, and might come out of the fiery trial as clear as pure gold from the furnace, and so might be thoroughly prepared for the special service of the Lord. After this they retired to their separate apartments, and lay down and rested in holy and calm sleep till the next morning.





CHAPTER XVI.

PUBLIC PROFESSION.

WHEN Mahendra, in order to recover Prasanna, appealed to the authorities for justice, it did not occur to him that in that way he would proclaim Prasanna's faith to the whole world. Strengthening himself in his paternal authority, he concluded that, as a matter of course, the magistrate would deliver his son to his care. But in executing true judgment and justice, Government investigates the rights of both father and son in the presence of all, and cannot show favour to any one. Somehow or other a report of the case had been spread abroad, and when the time to try it had come, the court was crowded with people who wished to know the particulars. One old and bigoted Brahman said, 'Now these missionaries will be thoroughly defeated.' Another said, 'I am not so sure of that. Indeed, I expect it is we who will be beaten. Their Bible says that no weapon formed against their religion will prosper.' 'Yes,' said a third; 'but Mahendra is rich. He will certainly do all that is required, and by presents or

bribes he will undoubtedly win his case.' Then a fourth person added, 'There is one thing in our favour, our magistrate is not one of those devout and saintly Christians who mind everything the missionaries say. He is an independent, honest man, and, though we are Hindus, he will certainly do us justice.'

Just at that time a closed palki came into the veranda of the court-house, and the conversation was interrupted. A respectable and richly-dressed native lady alighted from the palki, to the astonishment of all beholders. She was Prasanna's mother, and had never before been seen in so public a position. Indeed, all the members of her family considered themselves disgraced by her acting in this way. Sarju and Chandra had endeavoured to prevent her by force, but she had overcome their opposition by argument and persuasion. A mother's love is very powerful; and she felt that by means of it she could do anything for her boy. 'Surely,' she said, 'he will attend to me. And what can anybody else say about it?' Cherishing these hopes in her heart, she walked through the crowd towards the place where the magistrate was seated. Although she was completely veiled, and surrounded by her husband and sons, one or two persons made disrespectful remarks about her, and the magistrate observing this, gave a sign for her to be taken to a private room, where she might wait in retirement. Soon after this Prasanna came, walking between the missionary and Ram Dayal; two English friends of the missionary were also with them. When the people in the crowd saw Prasanna, an involuntary

buzz of excitement and expectation sounded through the court. Some persons whispered to others, 'Now we shall triumph.' 'See how pale, languid, and weak he looks. The missionaries have cruelly kept him in confinement.' 'It is a great shame; now their wickedness will be brought to light.'

The magistrate ordered silence, and the investigation began in due form. It soon became manifest to all that the missionary had not inveigled Prasanna. Indeed, it was only at his urgent entreaty that the missionary had received him into his house. Upon this Mahendra declared, 'My son is under age; therefore he ought to be delivered to my care.' The magistrate hearing this, shook his head and said, 'This young man does not appear to me to be under age. But what evidence or proof have you got in support of your statement?' Mahendra then produced Prasanna's horoscope, and according to that he was fifteen years and nine months old. Immediately on seeing this Prasanna indignantly said, 'Oh, father! how can you say that is my horoscope?' Then, turning to the magistrate, he said, 'Sir, that is not my horoscope.' The magistrate perceived in a moment that it was a forgery, because it was evident that it was recently written; and turning towards Mahendra he said, 'Forgery is a very great crime, and incurs a severe penalty. If you stand on this horoscope, it must be investigated, and then it will go hard with you. But religious faith is a matter in which every one is at liberty to judge for himself between truth and falsehood. I shall therefore ask the respondent

some questions, in order to examine his capability of judging; and if he appears competent to discriminate and judge in this matter, then he is at perfect liberty to act according to his own judgment.'

Upon this Sarju came forward, and said, 'Sir, I am the elder brother of this boy, and I declare on oath that he has been of weak mind from his birth, and is not competent to give any account of his actions.'

The magistrate sternly replied, 'Your brother will speak for himself, and then we shall soon know whether your statement is true or not.' Then turning to Prasanna he said, 'Young man, now tell me whether or no you went, as this missionary gentleman has said, of your own free will to his house, and whether or no you asked him to let you stay there?'

Prasanna answered, 'Yes, sir, I did so, and I had been wishing to do so for a month; but the missionary persuaded me to wait a little, and to think and examine the subject more thoroughly, because it is a very important matter. It was only yesterday he was convinced that I had really done so, and then he received me.'

The magistrate asked, 'What is the reason why you wished to become a Christian?'

Prasanna replied, 'I could not find in my own ancestral religion of the Hindu Shastras any adequate expedient for the forgiveness of my sin, the purification of my heart, or true salvation, with which my mind could be contented. But I found true wisdom in regard to all these important matters in Christianity, and for this reason I wish to be a Christian.'

Then the magistrate asked Prasanna, 'By what arguments are you convinced that the sacred teaching of Christianity is true, and that by means of it you can obtain salvation?'

In reply, Prasanna said, 'By reading the Christian Scriptures I came to the knowledge of various things regarding myself of which I had previously had no idea. So to speak, I saw myself as in a mirror, *i.e.* my nature and disposition, heart and soul, reflected there; and I saw the condition and circumstances of my life as in a picture; and although I was shown in this way to be very faulty and sinful, nevertheless I was not discouraged by it, because, together with this revelation of my miserable condition, I was also told distinctly of a notable and sufficient remedy for it all; and this whole account was plainly written out in those Scriptures with the utmost purity and tenderness, and love and truth. I became in this way quite convinced that it could possibly only come from God the Creator, who knows the secrets of all hearts; and, knowing this, I heartily accepted it; and when I had proved and examined it by experience and practice, I found it to be altogether true. Now I could more easily disbelieve my own living and conscious existence as a human being, than I can doubt that this Christian wisdom is from God: for my natural life is perishable, unsatisfying, and uncertain; but the spiritual life which I have obtained through this Divine wisdom is real, indestructible, satisfying, and eternal.'

Then the magistrate asked Prasanna another question: 'How do you know that the account you have

given of your mental experience is not all imagination and fancy ?'

Prasanna gave this answer: 'In this way I can know for a certainty that these facts are not mere fancy, viz., that the Scriptures, by means of and in accordance with the teaching of which they all took place in my own consciousness, are proved by various marks to be a Divine revelation. Now, facts which are brought to pass by means of and in accordance with the teaching of a Divine revelation, how can they possibly be mere fancy? I cannot at present describe all the marks by which the Christian Scriptures are proved to be a Divine revelation. But I can say, in brief, that the substance of Christianity consists in the facts regarding Jesus Christ. And these facts, which were foretold in Divine prophecy, took place in accordance with those predictions. These facts comprehend the birth, life, works, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ; His knowledge, wisdom, and teaching; His nature and attributes; His holiness, love, truth, and so on. And these were all so unparalleled, and so beyond human nature, and so Divine, that they must necessarily have indeed taken place. Because, if they had not actually occurred in this world, it was beyond the power of any man to invent them. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Then it is known, as a matter of history, that the effects of the work of Jesus Christ on the condition of the world have appeared to be Divine from the beginning. And the establishment and diffusion of the Christian Church, its religious

observances, doctrine, and work, all give testimony to their origin. If there were no other proof of the Divine origin of that religion, there is one which is not found in any other, viz., that Christianity is founded for all mankind, and is adapted to all mankind, and is being accepted by them. Certainly such a religion must have come from the Father of all mankind, *i.e.* God. For each separate race invents its own religion for itself only. But no one can know what a blessed religion this is except those who receive it into their hearts. Its inner wisdom is of a kind which the most acute and powerful intellect cannot take the measure of; and yet an ignorant and simple man, who knows the substance of it and accepts it, can by means of it obtain salvation. It fills the poor with spiritual riches; it wipes the tears of mourners; it cleanses the hearts of sinners; it comforts troubled souls; it brings relief to the sick; it whispers hope to the dying. Oh, my friends, I must become a Christian; would that you would all do the same!

When Prasanna had done speaking, the eyes of all present were fixed on the magistrate, to see what decision he would give. All the sensible and thoughtful people in the crowd knew very well that Christianity had triumphed. One said, 'The missionaries have taught the young fellow well, anyhow.' Another, a white-haired old Brahman, sad and silent, left the court muttering to himself, 'Our gods are fallen! are fallen!' Another gnashed his teeth in impotent rage.

Only Mahendra still cherished hope in his heart.

He heard what Prasanna said, but had not taken the purport of it into his mind. He had been, as it were, in a dream. His one thought and anxiety was to recover Prasanna as his own true son. When Prasanna had finished, Mahendra fell at the feet of the magistrate and piteously pleaded with him, saying, 'Now he may go home with me, sir! Will you not give an order for him to do so?' When the magistrate saw this he was somewhat moved by it, but firmly, though kindly, replied, 'No; I cannot give this order. Your son has embraced Christianity, and has given such excellent reasons and arguments for doing so that he is perfectly free and independent in the matter.' When Mahendra heard this he uttered a slight scream, and would have fallen, but Sarju and Chandra supported him. Then Mahendra, speaking slowly, said, 'He has not yet seen his mother.' And the magistrate ordered that he should go into the private room and see her alone.

When Prasanna turned to go towards the door, his whole frame quivered with excitement. He could not place his feet firmly on the ground. Every movement showed his inward agony. His hands became as cold as stone. He placed them on his burning brow, as if to obtain relief in that way. The swollen veins in his forehead showed how acute were his sufferings. He wished to conceal all this; but involuntarily this prayer escaped his lips, 'O Saviour, Thou wast born of woman, see and pity!' And immediately he was in his mother's presence.

'My jewel! my moon! the star of my life!' his

mother exclaimed, bursting into tears, 'what is this that I have heard to-day? that you are going to leave me? I brought you forth in pain, have fondled you from infancy, have nourished you in youth; and, now that you are grown up, are you going to leave me? No! no! it can never be! It was only a horrid dream. But now it is past, and we are awake again, you will come back to our home, my beloved boy, I know you will come.'

'Oh, mother! mother!' cried Prasanna, 'this suffering is killing me! Do stop, or I shall lose my senses. O God! this is like being offered in sacrifice; but in Thy service this too is right.' Then, repressing his pain, he said to his mother, 'Mother! you must let me go.'

'Let you go! never! jewel of my life!' exclaimed the broken-hearted woman, with a great cry; and, taking her son to her bosom, she leaned her head on his breast and poured forth from her lips a stream of endearing language. Sometimes maddened with despair, she said, 'How dark it is! there is no sun, no moon, no stars. They are all hidden in anger! Woe is me! What have I done to bring this curse on my head?' Then, infatuated with her suffering motherly love, she said, 'I cannot live without you. If you do not come back, I shall certainly die.' Then she began to denounce and to curse Christianity and Christians, and continued shrieking and crying. Nothing would quiet her.

At last Prasanna said, 'Mother, do not do so. Your love is unutterably precious to me. Nothing can be more precious to me, except my Saviour and my duty.'

Then he remembered that his mother could not understand the meaning of these words. What could she know about his Saviour and his duty? This thought greatly aggravated his sorrow, and, weeping bitterly, he cried out, 'O God, this is an awful sacrifice which Thou desirest from Thy creatures. The natural feeling of an agonized heart is as sharp as death!'

But he made the sacrifice; and he never repented of it. Casting a loving look at his mother, he rushed out of the room, and immediately went with his Christian friends to his Christian home.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE FRUITFUL RESULTS OF RIGHT CONDUCT.

WHEN Prasanna returned to the mission-house with his Christian friends, the excitement of his feelings did not subside in a moment. He was naturally of a gentle, ~~modest~~, and retiring disposition, and to be questioned as he had been in the court before every one regarding his religious faith, was extremely painful and disagreeable to him. The missionary, Ram Dayal, and the other Christians highly commended him for having answered the magistrate's questions with such courage, simplicity, and clearness. But Prasanna felt himself to be both ignorant and unworthy, and modestly feared that perhaps he had not given the right answers, and that he might have done some injury to his Hindu brethren by not showing forth properly the glory of the Lord. The Lord invariably helps such humble-minded disciples, and there can be no doubt that, according to the promise, He had given to His young servant 'a mouth and wisdom which none of his adversaries could gainsay or resist.' But his strenuous effort on the occasion involved

a great strain and wrench to his feelings, and the sight and the recollection of his mother's grief and agony continually pierced his heart with sorrow. However, he gradually found some comfort in the Lord's grace, and in the affectionate fellowship of his Christian brethren.

When Mahendra returned home with his wife and sons, the state of the household became such as it is impossible to describe. When a thoughtful Christian reflects upon it, it naturally occurs to him that the god of this world—*i.e.* the devil,—when he has blinded the minds of them that believe not, practises upon his unhappy subjects the most cruel oppression; for he not only blinds their minds, but he fetters their hands, feet, minds, and souls with the chains of slavery, and then makes a mock at all their sufferings; and so bewitches them by his sorcery that they even begin to love their chains, and refuse to be released by a deliverer. This appeared to be the condition of the chief part of Mahendra's household; Kamini's first wrath, indeed, was somewhat softened, and her wifely loving affection was beginning to revive as before; and when all the rest of the family were in a state of distraction and bewilderment, Prasanna's aged grandmother appeared generally silent and thoughtful, and spoke only to Kamini and her younger son, Rajendra; from him she constantly inquired after Prasanna, as to what Mahendra and the others were doing about him; and it was at her suggestion that he went to the court and saw and heard all that took place, and brought her a full report.

Since Rajendra had returned from Benares with his

nephew, he had kept himself quite clear of all religious discussion in the family. For though he knew Prasanna was sincere and honest, and that he had some real faith in Christianity, nevertheless, being himself totally careless about all religion, he thought that Prasanna would have neither the courage nor the strength to act outwardly according to his secret faith. That is why he had told his brother and nephews not to speak to Prasanna on religious subjects, and that he would never become a Christian. He had himself in his youth violently repressed his knowledge and feeling about sin and righteousness, had stifled his own conscience, and had thus done excessive injury to his spiritual nature. And one evidence of this was that he had no real faith in any religion, or in God Himself; and he even thought that whatever faith of that kind any one might have in his heart, still, he would never incur the smallest suffering in order to act in accordance with it. In short, his spiritual nature was as insensible as a dead man; and though he had not fallen into licentious habits, like his nephew Chandra, still he had no thought or care about anything except worldly objects. The manifest fruit of disobedience to the commands of the Divine power of conscience, and the frequent omen of impending destruction, is this brutal insensibility.

It is great cause for thankfulness that so long as a man lives in the world he cannot altogether destroy his spiritual nature, and sometimes events occur which make the conscience of even a careless man give commands and judgments with wonderful force, The

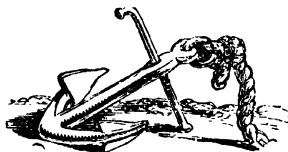
recent action of Prasanna was such an event in relation to Rajendra. It made him feel that Prasanna was very different from and very superior to himself, for his faith was not only undoubtedly sincere, but strong and influential too, and by its power he had done what Rajendra could never do. Then, when he reflected on what Prasanna had sacrificed for the sake of his religious faith,—viz., the support and protection of his parents, the sweet, tender affection of his beloved wife, his pride of caste, worldly profit and pleasure, the love of his family, his own share in the paternal estate, and so on,—it was quite certain that Prasanna had been honest in what he had done. And not only this, but by means of his faith he seemed to have become courageous and wise and strong, and in court he had given before all such reasons for his faith as no one could controvert. In comparison with him Rajendra appeared to himself to be deceitful, base, foolish, weak, contemptible, and cowardly; and if Christianity should be true, what awful loss he would suffer at last through his insensibility!

While these reflections were passing in his mind, Rajendra remained apart from the conversation of the rest of the family, for he had no wish to share in their consultations or plans. Instead of this, he formed the purpose of going to Prasanna. All that his mother had told him about his life having been saved by a missionary at the Sagar Mela, and what the missionary had said about the love of Christ in the Gospel, and the example he had given of it in his own conduct, recurred to his recollection, and he felt drawn towards

Prasanna, whether he would or no. On arriving there, Prasanna welcomed him with delight, and for a long while they conversed together most affectionately. At first Rajendra tried to persuade Prasanna not to receive Christian baptism, saying that it could not be necessary to salvation. But Prasanna gave him such an answer that for very shame he could not say another word to him on the subject. Prasanna said to him, 'As I have obtained the hope of salvation through the sufferings and the atoning death of my dear Lord, and believing in Him, am in heart His disciple, how could I be such a base and contemptible creature as, through fear of a little pain and disgrace, to refuse to acknowledge His boundless love and grace before all? It would be far better not to have known the Lord at all, than to act in so unworthy a manner. Besides, the Lord Himself has said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."'

When Prasanna saw the state of his uncle's mind, he was very desirous and hopeful that by the mercy and grace of the Lord he would gradually become His disciple, and he began to explain to him more fully the precious love of the Saviour, and the fulness and sufficiency of His salvation. He also wished to call the missionary and Ram Dayal, and to introduce his uncle to them; but Rajendra was not at all willing that he should do this, and when he saw Prasanna's eagerness he was a little alarmed. Prasanna therefore

at that time said nothing more to his uncle on the subject, and only inquired after the welfare of the family, especially of his wife, mother, and grandmother, and determined in his own mind that he would in future offer special prayer constantly to the Lord on their behalf, that they too might become partakers of His glorious salvation. Meanwhile Rajendra took leave, and returned to his own home.





CHAPTER XVIII.

UNEXPECTED VIOLENCE.

THE conversation which Prasanna held with his uncle Rajendra was a means of affording him peaceful consolation, and he began to hope that whatever pain or grief he might have been or might still be called to bear would, by being the occasion of spiritual good to his uncle and the other dear ones at home, soon be changed to pleasure and delight. While reflecting on these things, and in affectionate converse with his Christian brethren, and especially by life-giving fellowship with his beloved Lord, he again became patient, hopeful, and courageous. In this manner that week passed away and Sunday came; and the missionary had arranged to baptize Prasanna on the evening of that day in the mission-church, in the presence of the Christian congregation. Prasanna was present at the morning service, and it was the first time he had taken part with the Christian brotherhood in the public worship of Christ, and, through Him, of God the Father; and, like David, he could say, 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy

house! They will be still praising Thee. Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee! They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' After the service was over he returned to the house, and spent the day in reading the Bible, meditation, and prayer to the Lord, that he might be able to make a good confession of Him in the evening, and to show forth His glory by holy conduct all his life long.

When the time for the evening service came, the missionary took Ram Dayal and Prasanna in his carriage, and said to them, in reference to the approaching baptism, 'God be praised, that He has brought this painful business to so happy a conclusion!' Prasanna was thinking how he could give clear, brief, and fitting answers to the questions that would be put to him. The missionary's mind was occupied with thoughts of a different kind. Looking forward to the future, he saw, as in a vision, all kinds of circumstances, which he pictured to his own mind. At one time he saw his young convert going as a bold and fearless evangelist to preach the Word of Life in distant villages. Then, matured by age and experience, he had become pastor and teacher of the native Church of the missionary, who could then, like the apostles of old, travel everywhere preaching the Gospel. After this, taking a long mental view forward, he saw a great white throne, and around it was standing an innumerable company of the redeemed, and Prasanna was there, with his disciples, who had multiplied greatly; and he heard the voice of the Lord coming from the

throne, saying, 'Well done! good and faithful servant!' While these reveries filled the mind of the missionary, Ram Dayal alone appeared anxious, and kept looking suspiciously among the trees in the gardens by the road-side. Dimly seeing something in the darkness, he suddenly jumped from the carriage, calling out, 'I feared so. I was sure this was a false peace.' But what could be done then? Mahendra had bribed the retainers of a rich acquaintance, and instantly fifty armed men surrounded the gari. To drive the horses through the crowd was impossible; two of the men held their heads; three more pulled down the coachman and held him; Ram Dayal bravely wrestled with two Punjabee soldiers, in order to go and call for help. But Sarju called out, 'Fools! let the Christian dog go! Get hold of my brother; it is him we want.' To push the missionary to the side of the road, and drag the helpless Prasanna out of the gari was the work of a moment. Instantly they thrust him, bruised and blindfold, into another carriage, which they drove off along the road with the speed of lightning.

The missionary and Ram Dayal remained standing bewildered, as if in a dream. All at once, as though by magic, Prasanna, carriage, horses, armed men, all had vanished in the darkness. The ruffians had accomplished their object; and to escape punishment was now the only thing they thought of. With heavy hearts the missionary and Ram Dayal went on their way to the church, pondering what ought to be done now. The Lord had permitted this to take place, and trust in Him must not give way. At length the

missionary exclaimed, 'What a piece of violence and wickedness this is, Ram Dayal! We must inform the authorities of it to-morrow morning.'

'Sir,' said Ram Dayal, 'if you will forgive me, I do not think it would be well to do so.' And when the missionary asked him why, he said, 'Because to use Government authority in religious matters is bad. Many people of this country both think and say that it is only because there is a Christian Government that the Christian religion is spreading; such a fancy is indeed foolish and false, but still it is very injurious to our work. If the Government were now to seek out Prasanna and find him, and release him by force, people would certainly say he had become a Christian by order of Government.'

The missionary replied, 'There is something in that, certainly. But is nothing to be done for the release of poor Prasanna?'

'What the first disciples did,' answered Ram Dayal, 'for the Apostle Peter can be done for Prasanna: we ought to pray unceasingly to the Lord to deliver him, and in due time he will certainly be released.'

'But will not his family do him some injury?' asked the missionary. 'Is it not true that sometimes poison is given in such households? Do they not do this to hide female dishonour? and will not pride of caste cause it too? or will they not ruin Prasanna's intellect by charras or opium?'

Ram Dayal replied, 'In my opinion they will not do this. I have, indeed, heard such stories, and perhaps in former times they used to do such things. But I

never saw anything of the kind myself, and I think such accounts are generally either inventions or exaggerations.'

'I am pleased and thankful,' said the missionary, 'to hear you say so. Let us put our trust in the Lord, and pray to Him to preserve Prasanna from all injury.'

On the one hand, the missionary and Ram Dayal, seated in their gari, were talking thus to each other; while, in a different direction, Sarju was urging the coachman of the other vehicle, in the bottom of which Prasanna was lying blindfold, to drive along as fast as he could. For a time both brothers were silent. Prasanna's eyes were bound, but a deeper darkness than that had spread over his heart, and he began to think thus: 'Is there any true God or not? Is Jesus Christ a true incarnation of Him? If so, why does He let His religion be dishonoured in this way? Is His religion, or Hinduism true? It would be a good thing if the whole universe were destroyed in order to settle this point. Alas! what a fool I am! how could this point be settled by universal destruction? Perhaps both religions are nothing but myths. Perhaps I am only a myth and a delusion. If there came a general crash, how much of me would remain? Is there anything real now? What is an argument?'

Thoughts like these were chasing each other through the exhausted mind of the afflicted Prasanna. 'Courage, poor faltering disciple! The great enemy is permitted to tempt you now. But One stronger than

he is with you. He will preserve you, and make you victorious, and bring you to His glory.'

Sarju saw that Prasanna was lying silent and motionless, and thought that perhaps he was not sorry to return home, and even might be glad to do so. And as no one could now follow them to release him, he took off the bandage from his eyes and said to him, 'Come, Prasanna, now that you are escaped from those wretched Christians, tell me truly whether you are not glad to be released from their absurd customs and deceitful words.'

The grieved countenance and sad voice of Prasanna showed at once how much mental pain he was suffering, for he replied, 'Whether deceitful or not, I at least found pleasure and peace in them; and now what is there instead of them? Nothing but the darkness of despair! For I can never be a Hindu again. Am I to die like an infidel or a beast? Yes, so it must be. All is illusion and deceit. O God! if there be any God, blot me out of this hateful universe!'

Sarju took hold of his words and replied, 'Yes, that is just it. Your God could not save you. The cudgels of the Rajputs were stronger than He is. What is the use of such a God as that? It is a good thing for you that I have saved you from Him.'

Prasanna, hearing this, eagerly replied, 'Do not blaspheme God. He is my God, and will deliver me. He has some purpose in all this, and you yourself will know this too. But where are you taking me? Is our house so far as this?'

Then Sarju explained to him that, in consequence

of his having joined the Christians, a great number of Brahmans and priests had been troubling them, because the caste of the family had been destroyed ; and Prasanna's father-in-law had threatened to remove Kamini to his own house ; but Mahendra would not let her go, because they hoped through her attraction to recover Prasanna again. After this, in order to escape all this trouble and disgrace, all the family except Rajendra had removed to the house of their mother's brother, which was about thirty miles from Calcutta, and there they were all waiting for them. On hearing this, Prasanna said nothing more, but continued to pray in his heart to the Lord ; and thus his faith grew stronger. After about four hours' hard driving they at length reached the house.





CHAPTER XIX.

A FIENDISH PLOT.

THE household of Mahendra were listening attentively in his brother-in-law's house to catch the first sounds of the gari and horses, indicating the approach of Sarju. In the stillness of midnight they were heard a long way off; and the quick driving was a sign that Sarju was bringing his brother with him. The house was built in a garden, and the gatekeeper had been told to strike the gong loudly if Prasanna was in the gari. He did so; and when the sound of the gong was heard, all the people cried out, 'Hari Bol! Hari Bol!' and all the rooms resounded with shouts of triumph.

While they were so delighted at Prasanna's return, the case with him was altogether different. For when they were shouting all round about him, and his father falling weeping on his neck, and Chandra and Nawa were asking all sorts of questions, Prasanna did not utter a word. The sight of him so silent and sad damped their joy too, and for that reason they sent him to his mother in the women's apartments.

When he saw his mother he burst into tears, and said, 'Oh, mother, mother! it was not right to do this. Why have you done it? I am a Christian at heart, and can never again be a Hindu.'

Then his mother began, as before, to persuade him, saying, 'Why, my boy! you have not yet been baptized; you have not yet eaten cow's flesh; atonement can be made,' and so on. And then she added, 'Don't you wish to see your dear, beautiful wife? Oh, yes, I know you do. But without atonement this can never be; for she declares that, without this, it would be better for her to die than to see you.'

Prasanna answered, 'Yes, mother, I do very much wish to see her directly; but if this too is forbidden, please let me be alone in a solitary room, that I may think and pray a little.' His mother did so, and also appointed some one to watch the door.

That night Prasanna was the only one in that household who was able, towards the morning, to get a little sleep. Mahendra had collected some Brahmans together, in order to consult and arrange about the restoration of Prasanna's caste; but the difficulty was that this could not be done without his full consent. Therefore the first thing was to contrive how to bring his firm mind into subjection; and they decided that they would do whatever was necessary to this end, namely, shut him up alone in a room, and get power over him by coaxing, persuasion, expostulation, threatening, or even persecution. They did not consider much what would be the effect of such conduct upon him,—whether his moral conduct, or his heart, or

his conscience, or his intellect, or even his life, might be destroyed by it. There is a kind of madness which is called monomania, which means that a person is mad on one subject. Now all these persons were mad on the subject of their caste, and they were ready to do anything to preserve their Brahmanical lock of hair and thread, and were quite sure it would not be at all difficult to overcome Prasanna's objections. But they were totally ignorant of the power of true Christian faith.

At first, in accordance with the advice of Chandra, they endeavoured to amuse and mislead him by the allurements of pleasure; for if they could in this way bring his conscience under the dominion of his senses, what would he care about the true religion? Supposing he were to become dissolute, contemptible, and a child of hell, what matter?—his and their disgrace would be averted. With a view to this, Chandra brought wine, dancing-girls, and other means of ungodliness and wickedness, and made use of all sorts of entertainments, sports, and pastimes, in order to try and entrap him. But Prasanna, through the help of the Lord, was strong in the faith, and escaped from this treacherous device, being disgusted with such impurities. He shut the door of his room and continued praying to the Lord, and thus overcame the enemy.

When they saw that nothing was accomplished by these devices, they set a different kind of plan on foot. They had already brought all the arguments they could in support of the Hindu Shastras; and that

attempt too had been fruitless, for they could not refute Prasanna's arguments. In these circumstances, what could they do besides using severe language, persecuting and tormenting him? Sarju was the leader in this kind of cruelty. He took his bedding away from him, gave him coarse diet and coarse clothing instead of what he was accustomed to; would not let him smoke, or bathe, or read or write letters; and suffered no one but his grandmother to go into his room to speak with him. It would not have been surprising if such treatment had driven him mad. Perhaps Sarju may even have thought and meant this; anyhow, he contrived to raise the question among the Brahmans, whether atonement could not be made for a person out of his senses, even though he did not consent to it. At first the Brahmans would not agree to this, but said that without Prasanna's consent the atonement would have no efficacy. Prasanna, however, would not give his consent, and there appeared no likelihood of his doing so; the Brahmans became impatient and dissatisfied, and threatened to put the whole family out of caste, for they were anxious to secure their promised rewards. Besides, the heart of his mother was full of grief, and Kamini was pining in her widowhood, and the calamity and disgrace were making Mahendra's hairs whiter and his step more unsteady; and the mother's brother was distressed on account of all these things, and wished all the family to leave his house, that this excitement and reproach might come to an end.

Sarju gnashed his teeth with wrath and indignation

when he saw this state of things. Mahendra had become helpless, and Sarju was the real head of the family. When the grandmother saw his anger, she was very much concerned as to what he might do to Prasanna. It was she alone who prepared Prasanna's food and gave it to him, and she went silent and tearful to and from his room, and most carefully watched the conduct of others, especially of Sarju. Just at that time Kamini called a wily magician, in order to get Prasanna into her power by sorcery. After having taken a large sum of money, he said it could not be accomplished in less than thirty-three days; but how could such a long delay be endured? Sarju settled it in his own mind that this was impossible; some other expedient must be adopted. In those days he was frequently absent from the house. If any one had followed him, he would have seen that he went to the house of a hideous old sorceress who lived a long way off; but who could tell what his object was in continually going to her? Only his grandmother guessed what it might perhaps be, and she observed and watched his every act and word; and it was only when he was away from her dear Prasanna that she was at all at ease.

At length, one day Sarju astonished them all by saying that after two days Prasanna would perform all the prescribed atonement for having joined the Christians; and not only this, he would do it spontaneously; but he was ashamed to say so openly, he had only said it in private to Sarju. His grandmother had seen no token of this change of mind in Prasanna;

nevertheless, the whole family, with the utmost delight, busied themselves in making arrangements for the atonement. That evening, when his grandmother was taking Prasanna's food into his room, Sarju called to her, and said, 'O Thakur ma, I have just made this sherbet for myself, please take this cup to Prasanna with my love.' The grandmother took the cup readily, but when Sarju had gone she threw the whole contents out of the window, and immediately prepared some more and took it to Prasanna, saying, 'Drink this.' He asked her, 'Did Sarju send this?' She said, 'Yes, drink it.' His grandmother had never deceived him, so he immediately drank off the pleasant draught.

The next day Sarju seemed to be very restless and disturbed. He did not go into Prasanna's room, but kept near the door, as if to hear any news he could from his grandmother, who was going in and out; but she did not speak to him. Then the day of atonement came, and the great entertainment was ready, and Sarju could wait no longer. Taking his father, uncle, and the Brahmans with him, he rushed into Prasanna's room, and cried out, 'Come, Prasanna, you promised to make atonement to-day; everything is now ready.' Prasanna, astonished, said, 'When, and to whom, did I give this promise? I do not understand what you are saying.' Sarju, furious with indignation, replied, 'Well, what sort of a thing is this? What did you say to me the day before yesterday? You fool! do you pretend now to have forgotten it? Do you not repent of what you have done?' Prasanna said,

‘There is only one thing that I repent of,—that I dishonoured God for so many years by following the Hindu religion, and not being a worshipper of the true Lord of heaven and earth.’ Hearing this, Sarju exclaimed, ‘Halloa! talking like this in a Hindu house, and surrounded by Brahmans! He is mad, as I have all along said. Will you not believe it now?’ Then the chief Brahman said, ‘His madness is not so clear. Are you not trifling with us? If he is mad, you said that he would agree to everything. Now tell him that everything is ready, and that he must come and make atonement; or else what becomes of the religion of you all? As for us, we cannot wait any longer.’

Upon this the anger of Sarju passed all bounds, and he called them all fools and madmen. But the Brahmans remained firm, and Prasanna calmly said, ‘Immediately on obtaining release I shall return to my Christian brethren. Whatever expense and effort you incur will all be wasted.’ Then Sarju, pale with passion, exclaimed, ‘You shall never return!’ Prasanna answered, ‘Very well, I am prepared for that too; but I will never deny my Lord; He will give me the crown of eternal life, and you can have no power over me. You may indeed kill me, as my Lord was killed, but you cannot change my mind.’

Sarju then began to doubt whether or no Prasanna had ever drunk what the witch had prepared for him, so he asked him, ‘When you said you would make atonement, did your grandmother give you some sherbet to drink, which I sent you?’ Prasanna

answered, 'Yes, I drank it; but I never said a word about atonement.' Then Mahendra and his brother-in-law said, 'Leave him alone; what is the use of any further discussion?' And his uncle added, 'You must remove him from my house, and these Brahmans must purify us for having let him live amongst us.' Upon this Sarju asked his father, 'If Prasanna escapes in this way, how will you ever get Amritta married? Who will ever take her? Both the old men acknowledged that this was true; and Mahendra said, 'Very well, you must do what you like.' Sarju said, 'I can do it; but where will all the money come from?' And Mahendra replied, 'I will give everything to save my son.'





CHAPTER XX.

‘THE BITER BIT.’

WHEN Sarju behaved in such a harsh and cruel manner to Prasanna, no one should suppose that he did it from actual enmity towards his brother. The true reason of it was that he had sincere faith in his own religion; and as he practised its commands and observances his temper became conformed to it. Such men are rare now in comparison with former times, and for this reason they seem rather terrible; for Christian teaching has influence upon Hindus, whether they will or no, and there is ample room in Hinduism for all sorts of people. Sarju hated Christianity, and that was why he persecuted its disciple. Mahendra and his family generally were ignorant of that religion, but Chandra and Rajendra despised it and all religion. Of these, Rajendra was a respectable man, and Chandra disreputable. Then the Benares pundit Vishwanath was an atheist, and believed in no God whatever. So far as the grandmother knew anything about Christianity, she liked it yet all these, because they observed caste,

were considered good Hindus ; but, perhaps, no one except Sarju wished to persecute Prasanna as he did, though none of them could hinder him from doing so.

It happened that at that time Rajendra came to see how they were, and had some conversation with his mother ; and when he heard how severely Sarju was treating Prasanna, and what sort of suspicions his mother felt about him, he became very anxious, and, being fickle and undecided, he inclined first to one side and then to the other. For one thing, he thought that perhaps on account of his present suffering Prasanna would be disposed to renounce his new faith, and for this purpose he spoke to him and said, ' What care does your Lord take of you now ? is it not folly to trust Him any longer ? ' But Prasanna gave him a straightforward and clear answer, as follows : ' My Lord suffered so much pain, and gave up His life for me, cannot I bear a little suffering for Him ? He will certainly help me at the proper time ; indeed, He is now helping me every day.' When Rajendra heard this, he went over to his side and wished to do what he could to release him. He also told his mother that if any opportunity for doing so occurred, she should immediately send for him and he would instantly come and help her.

In this manner Prasanna was being put to the test, and was triumphing by the power of faith ; while Sarju, being the slave of a false religion, grew more and more hard-hearted and fiendish. By means of these two the Lord was putting to the test and

teaching all their relatives. Indeed, all mankind are perpetually being tested and taught in this way. When the grandmother observed that Sarju became more and more bitter and irritable, she watched him with increasing care, and bribed the son of the milk-woman, whom Sarju did not know, to follow him and see where he went and what he did. He did so, and saw that Sarju passed through the neighbouring village, and went along the road on the banks of the Hugli for about three miles, till he came to a desolate place, where there was a hovel. There was not a green tree to be seen, but there were the ruins of temples and pillars scattered all around,—the home of lizards, scorpions, snakes, and other poisonous animals; and hemp, thorn-apple, poppy, and other noxious plants abounded. The door of the hovel was towards the north, and near it there was a muddy pool of water. Sarju stood at the door and called somebody by name, but no sound came from within, except the growling of a dog. Just then, from behind a heap of ruins, a hideous, ugly, half-naked old woman, like a witch, appeared. On seeing her, disgust and terror filled the mind. She had some poisonous herbs in her hand, and in her countenance there were the marks of the hateful passions of a female fiend, and in a hissing voice she said, ‘Halloa! Babu, have you come back again? do you want to get me hanged?’ Sarju answered, ‘I want another draught; that one did no good.’

‘That did no good! then your brother did not drink it, or else he would not be alive and in his senses now.’

‘He did drink it; but he is a Christian, and nothing but deadly poison will affect him.’

‘Hum! I understand! a pretty brother you are! but such a potion must be mixed in a golden cup.’ Then Sarju opened his purse and showed it to her, saying, ‘Come inside, I will not tell you here.’ Upon this they both went into the hovel.

But the spy had hidden himself among the ruins, and had heard. He returned to the grandmother and reported all to her. On hearing this she was very much distressed, and thought, ‘Will dear Prasanna be murdered in this way? But how is it possible to save him from these dangers? If Sarju himself gives him the poison to drink, what can be done?’ It occurred to her to contrive so that Prasanna might make his escape; but Sarju had placed watchmen all around to guard him; and she was afraid that not only would Prasanna not be able to escape, but that she herself would be found out, and then they would put her out of caste too. However, she sent for her second son, Rajendra; but, on account of the distance, this took time, and it was necessary to be prompt in order to put a stop to this fiendish plot of Sarju’s. After thinking over these difficulties, she said to her son Mahendra, ‘I am going to a temple some way off to present an offering, in order that the *devota* may give us his help in changing Prasanna’s mind.’ Mahendra did not at once agree to what his mother said, and tried in many ways to hinder her. But she answered, ‘This is a matter of religion; I have three times had a dream at night, and have seen all the particulars, and

I alone can do this ; and if any one tries to hinder or follow me, some dreadful calamity will befall him.' Upon this Mahendra allowed her to go.

The grandmother then disguised her appearance with her clothes, and made herself look like another person ; she then took the son of the milk-woman, and went in search of the witch. As she went along and entered the thick jungle she heard the cries of the jackal and the hyena, but she was not alarmed, because she was filled with the desire to save Prasanna.

Suddenly the boy pointed out to her the witch, who was collecting the herbs used in her hellish art. She sent the boy a little way back, and went straight up to the sorceress, and said to her with a threatening voice, ' So, I have found you ! yes, I knew I should find you here. And you thought to make a Christian mad by your poison ! and now you are gathering the thorny-apple in order to kill him. Yes, I know all about it ; and I know this too, that when Sarju Babu gives him this to drink, that very moment you too will die. Instantly, by drowning, or a thunderbolt, or by snake-bite, you will meet your doom.'

When the witch heard this, and saw the grandmother, she trembled, and cried out, ' Alas, my doom has come ! I am already ruined.'

The grandmother replied, ' That is true enough ; but there is one way of escape for you ! Change that poisonous draught for one that will cause heavy sleep. Can you do this or not ?'

She replied, ' Yes, I can do this ; but what good

will that be to me? I have already received forty rupees, and I am to have forty more for this.'

Then the grandmother showed her a necklace of pearls, and asked her what it was worth, and she said, 'A hundred rupees.'

Upon this the grandmother replied, 'Swear by the head of your mother that you will change the draught, and then you shall have this.'

The witch answered, 'By the head of my mother I will do it.'

The grandmother then explained to her that, allowing one day to pass, she was to prepare a draught which would cause whoever drank it to fall into a sleep like death for twelve hours, but afterwards to recover sense and receive no injury; she gave the witch some money, and promised that when she had done what secured the desired end she should have the necklace of pearls; but if she turned out deceitful she would certainly be destroyed. Saying this, the grandmother returned home.

When she arrived there she told Mahendra that after two days, at midnight, atonement would be made for Prasanna, and at that time he and Prasanna's mother would embrace him, and his elder brother would lift him in his arms; that was what the oracle had said, and they were now again to make preparation for the atonement: which they accordingly did.

On the morrow Rajendra came, and his mother told him all that she had done, and said that on the next day the sleeping draught would be given, and that at night they would all suppose he was dead. . What

they would then do she could not tell; it would be no wonder if they took him away to burn him; but he would not be dead, and Rajendra must in some way or other contrive to rescue him from them, and deliver him over to the Christians. Rajendra, having agreed to do this, went away.

When Prasanna's grandmother, in order to save him, practised all this deception, she was doing, according to her own judgment, a very good thing. For she did not know that under no circumstances can it be right to practise deceit. If she had had true Christian faith, she would have trusted in God, and have told her son Mahendra what Sarju was doing, and what he wished to do; she would have told him all his wickedness, and have endeavoured in a straightforward way to put a stop to it. But she had not the courage for such an undertaking; and this is not at all wonderful. For by continually living in a state of slavery and ignorance, the mind becomes timid, weak, and cowardly, and invents crooked and deceitful plans. But it cannot find rest or courage in this way; accordingly, the grandmother thought, 'Will the witch deceive me now? Perhaps she will give real poison to Prasanna. If he escapes that, will not Sarju find some other way to accomplish his purpose? What shall I do then?'

True, grandmother, Prasanna cannot escape merely through your affection and effort; but there is One greater than you Who can save him by your means. It remains to be seen in what manner the Lord of Prasanna will save His faithful disciple from all these dangers.



CHAPTER XXI.

DIVINE RETRIBUTION.

THE next day the grandmother prepared Prasanna's evening meal rather early, and gave it to him, and then quickly retired to her own room. Her mind was much disturbed as to what kind of draught the old sorceress would prepare, and how Sarju would give it to his brother to drink, and what would be the result. She thought of these things until she trembled, for she knew that Prasanna had no charm against poison. However, she had a kind of persuasion that the same God who, although she did not worship Him, had preserved her fifty years before from murdering her own child, would certainly deliver His true worshipper.

Meanwhile, about nine o'clock, Sarju came stealthily to his grandmother's door and knocked, saying, 'Thakur ma! Thakur ma! I wish you would go to my brother Prasanna. I don't know what's the matter. It seems that he is breathing with difficulty.' On hearing this she went trembling into Prasanna's room, and saw that he was stretched on the floor,

motionless, breathless, cold, like a corpse, and his eyes were half closed and glassy. When she saw this she thought, 'The witch has deceived me !' and crying out with the sharp pain, she said, 'My grandson is dead, is dead ! no one can waken him ; come and see ! Alas ! alas !'

Hearing this outcry, the whole family instantly came together, and there can be no doubt that their grief was very deep and sincere. His mother shrieked, and wished to fall upon his dead body, but they restrained her. His father's heart was too broken for him to speak a word. Chandra and Nawa were very sad at the death of their former companion ; and even Sarju cried out, 'O my brother !' The Brahmans agreed that atonement could be made for a dead man, and they began to make all proper preparations for it according to the regulations. When they had done this, and muttered a great many incantations, they said that it was all right ; and the father and mother embraced their son, and wept bitterly. They all of them, through grief, forgot their former anger. When Sarju saw this he was extremely distressed, and made a sign to the bearers to come near and take up the bier ; then, lifting the body in his arms, he placed it on the bier, and arranged the clothes, in order to take it to the river. Mahendra looked towards his mother, who said to him, 'Yes, my son, that is what the oracle said.'

Day had not broken when they began to go towards the river. Although they believed Prasanna to be dead, they did not wish the reproach of his having

died in the house to rest upon the family. Therefore Sarju pretended that his brother was just about to die, and they must immediately place his feet in the water of the river. The bearers quickly took up the bier, and went with all speed to the river's edge, and there did as he had said. Prasanna's head rested on Sarju's bosom, and the Brahmans placed a Tulsi plant beside him. Then they arranged the wood for the funeral pile, and got the new clothes ready; and when Sarju had put them on the body, he began to place it on the funeral pile.

Meanwhile twelve hours had passed since Prasanna had taken the witch's potion, and the effect of it was beginning to pass away. The crying and screaming of the people, also the cold night air, the rapid motion of the bearers, and the shock of the cold water to his feet, all helped to rouse him from his unconsciousness. When Sarju began to lift him up to place him on the funeral pile, his consciousness returned, and he stood up, and with a great cry clutched Sarju's throat. This horrible state of things was more than Sarju could bear. For several days he had been like a madman through his violent rage, and he had just brought the guilt of fratricide on his conscience. Now, in the darkness of early morning, the clutch of his brother upon his throat was like that of a fiend. It seemed that his doom had come, and that destiny was dragging him down to hell. With a loud scream he cried out, 'Hell opens its mouth! the lord of hell has seized me! Let me go! let me go!' and, releasing himself with violence, he rushed from the spot a howling,

raving maniac. Utter confusion followed; no one could tell what had happened; terrified and alarmed, they all fled for their lives.

When Prasanna's consciousness returned, and he found himself alone in the morning twilight on the banks of the river, he wondered what could have happened to him, and what was going to happen, where he was, who they were who had fled, and what they had been doing. Gradually his excited feelings became more calm, and he perceived that they were intending, undoubtedly, to perform his funeral rites, and that it was his brother Sarju who had run away; and he thought that he and the Brahmans would return. From fear of this, and in order to save himself, he hid among the bushes and sat down beneath a pipul tree, and began to think what he ought to do. Day had now dawned, and the light had spread over river, land, and wood; all were now distinctly visible. A gentle, pleasant, cool breeze was blowing, and the birds were chirping and singing all around. For many days Prasanna had been shut up in the room in his uncle's house, and had seen nothing like this for a long while; and when he saw the trees, and the wild flowers, and the grass in the clear light of day, he thought them very beautiful; and he remembered the Creator of them all, and in a spiritual sense he heard the comforting words of the Lord speaking to him and saying, 'Fear not! I am with thee; I will save thee both from fire and from water, and will never forsake thee.' Then Prasanna's heart was comforted, and he praised the Lord.



Just then he heard the sound of a gari or some other conveyance which was coming along the road, and, hiding himself in the shrubs, he went near to the road to see who was coming: presently he saw two persons seated in a country conveyance to which a horse was attached. He could not very well see what they were like, but he thought one of them was his uncle Rajendra, and the other the Christian, Ram Dayal. When the gari came near to the place where the funeral pile had been prepared, it stopped, and they both alighted, and searched about in every direction, as if seeking for some one. Immediately Prasanna thought they were looking for him; and coming forward he said, 'Here I am.' When they saw him they were very much pleased, and told him to get into the gari directly, and go with Ram Dayal to the missionary's house; while Rajendra would go to the house where the family was, and learn all about them, and, as opportunity offered, send word of them to Prasanna.

When Prasanna was seated with Ram Dayal in the gari, he learned how his uncle had been warned by his grandmother, and had gone to the missionary and told him what was going on, and had come with Ram Dayal in order to rescue him, if possible, as he had done. When he heard these particulars he was very much surprised and very grateful, and in company with his Christian brother offered thanksgiving and praise to the Lord. Ram Dayal pointed out to him that the Lord has innumerable means of rescuing His servants, because the hearts of all men are in His

hands, and He can use even those who do not believe in Him for the protection and deliverance of His true disciples. So that a true Christian ought never to despond ; for at the right time and in the best way the Lord is sure to appear for his deliverance.

When they reached the mission compound, all those who lived in it, who had been looking out for them, ran with great joy to welcome them. According to the counsel of Ram Dayal, they had every day prayed to the Lord for the protection and deliverance of Prasanna. They, therefore, considered that in bringing all these events to such a conclusion, He had given an answer of peace to their prayers. After two days, Sunday returned, and the Christian brotherhood met again in the house of prayer for worship ; and this time Prasanna was able to be in their midst without any hindrance. When he stood up to receive baptism, he was first of all asked, ‘ What do you think of Christ ? ’ Prasanna answered, ‘ At the time of full moon, one night the moon and all the stars were shining with great splendour, and all the mountains were burning as it were with fire, as if to turn the night to day : but still it continued night, until the sun arose. For me Jesus is that sun. The darkness of night has gone, and the light of day, Christ, shines in my heart, and all around me. Through that dear Lord I obtain peace and salvation and life.’ Then the missionary asked him, ‘ How can you obtain salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ ? ’ The answer to this was : ‘ Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God, and our substitute, fulfilled the law of God for us, and was “ obedient unto

death, even the death of the cross." Thus He made atonement for our sins, and gives the benefit of His righteousness to His believing disciples. In this manner sinful men who believe in Him and are united with Him, obtain the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life.' After this Prasanna answered other questions in a similar manner,—viz., for what reasons he could not find the way of salvation, or peace of mind, in the Hindu religion; and that now, being constrained by the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, he purposed to regulate his life and conduct in accordance with the law of love. After this he took off his Brahmanical thread and handed it to the missionary, receiving in exchange a copy of the Bible, and then by baptism, prayer, and thanksgiving he was united with the Christian Church.

There will, hereafter, be some account given of the subsequent circumstances of Prasanna among his Christian brethren, but we must say a little about his uncle Rajendra and his brother Sarju. When Rajendra arrived at the house he told only his mother about Prasanna, and heard from her what had happened to him since their last meeting, and also what had occurred in the family. Awful distraction had taken possession of them in consequence of what had occurred at the burning ghat, and of the dreadful condition of Sarju. His madness at first was not so outrageous and violent that they thought it necessary to confine him, neither did they apply any remedy for it. All the family of Mahendra left his brother-in-law's house as soon as possible, and returned to their own home, and they thought that Sarju would in the course

of time recover his senses ; but this did not take place. He became more violent and unmanageable, and eventually struck even his own mother, and wished to throw his infant child out of the window. Then they were obliged to confine him in a room by himself. His end was most horrible. One night a terrific sound of screaming was heard in his room, and when with difficulty they opened the door, they saw that the unhappy Sarju was being burned to death. The lamp, which had been fixed on the wall, had suddenly fallen down and set fire to the bedding on which he was sleeping. He was bound with chains, and could neither extinguish the fire nor rescue himself. They sent immediately for water, but it was some time before it came ; and when it did come and they threw it over him, it only increased his agony. At length, suffering unutterable torment, he expired. Thus, by a kind of Divine retribution, ‘ into the pit which he had dug for his brother he was fallen himself.’





CHAPTER XXII.

CHRISTIAN DOMESTIC MANNERS.

IN the mission compound there were rows of houses built in the form of barracks, in which Christian students who attended the High School resided. They were occupied by eight or ten such youths, and amongst them one room was appointed for Prasanna. He had expressed a desire to become a Christian preacher, and, in regard to intelligence, learning, wisdom, and piety, his friends thought him capable of becoming skilful, faithful, and efficient in the discharge of that responsible work. He therefore entered the theological class of the High School, and soon began to find peace and happiness in the companionship of his Christian brethren and in attending the special instruction of the missionary. For whoever with a pure motive gives himself up with self-denial to the service of God, is sure to find satisfaction and comfort in his heart in so doing.

No one, however, could suppose that Prasanna found nothing but pleasure and enjoyment in his new circumstances; for there were several things that caused

him distress. His room was small and poorly furnished, and his monthly allowance was much less than before; and instead of the tasteful food he had been accustomed to, what he now had was insipid and coarse. It was cooked by an aged Christian widow, and it was some time before Prasanna could eat it with relish. Besides this, thoughts of his beloved wife and family were continually coming into his mind, and he felt always an intense longing to hear their voices and see their forms. While reflecting on these things he sometimes became sad, and although his Christian brethren treated him affectionately, some of their ways were strange and outlandish to him; and he gradually came to see that their being Christian brethren did not make them faultless: for the taint of sin is not overcome in a moment. There were, however, certain good qualities apparent among them which are rare in other Indians. One special point was the respect paid to women and the instruction given to them. In consequence of this, their trustworthiness, seemly behaviour, and piety were very apparent. And their manner of conducting their households was most excellent and pleasing. In this way the relations of husband and wife, parents and children, were observed in an affectionate, pure, and religious spirit, and thus the peace and comfort of all were promoted.

This happy state of things was very evident even among the Christian brethren and sisters of India; but it was seen to perfection in the families of devout foreign Christians. One evening the missionary invited Prasanna to go to his house and take tea with him

and his wife. It so happened that at that time two other foreign gentlemen came in, and all five spent the evening in conversation with one another. When Prasanna arrived at the house, the missionary and his wife were waiting at the top of the stairs to welcome him, and they took him into a room in which the two other gentlemen were seated. The room was brilliantly lighted with lamps, and in the centre of it was a table, around which they all sat down and began to take their tea. Prasanna had never before seen such a mode of taking food. The lady, as president of the company, sat near where the tea things were arranged on the table, upon which also different kinds of cake, fruit, flowers, and other sweet-scented and sweet-tasting things were arranged. Some tea and hot water were put into the tea-pot, and the lady poured it out into cups, mixed sugar and milk into it, and distributed it among her guests. They also took some cake, or fruit, or sweetmeat, and conversed with one another, and now and then sipped a little tea. Prasanna observed that all the gentlemen present treated the lady with the utmost respect when they addressed her, and paid her very great honour; she also conversed with them with perfect modesty, dignity, intelligence, and grace. They talked about all kinds of things, such as science, history, natural objects, vegetation, animals, the circumstances of different countries, their inhabitants, their government, their civilization, religious matters, also books and doctrine. And in all these subjects the lady possessed some knowledge and understanding; and in conversation asked and

answered such questions as showed that she had an acute mind, a pure disposition, a refined taste, and an affectionate heart.

When Prasanna observed all this he was astonished, and began to compare it in his own mind with the condition of the females among his former connections ; and he became so absorbed in such thoughts, that, while the conversation was going on, he alone was silent. When the lady saw this, she commenced to converse with him separately from the rest, and as soon as she ascertained what he was thinking of, she asked him to tell her about the condition of the girls and young women of his own country. She also told Prasanna what kind of instruction she had received in her own childhood and youth, about her own country and family, and what sort of relation exists between husbands and wives among Christian races and in Christian countries, and of the deportment of men and women towards each other. Also how the disrespect and dishonour which everywhere had been shown to women throughout the world had been abolished by the Lord Jesus Christ, so that now amongst all civilized and Christian people, men and women continually meet and converse together with the utmost purity and benefit ; and thus civilization, correct conduct, and piety are promoted. Then when the lady received fresher and fuller accounts from Prasanna of the condition of women in India, she was deeply grieved, and became more zealous and enthusiastic than before in her desire to spend her life in doing what she could to help them.

By this time the other gentlemen were desirous to leave, and the missionary, according to his custom, brought the Bible and read a portion of it, and then they all sang a hymn to a tune which the lady played on a harmonium. Then the missionary offered a prayer to God for all kinds of spiritual and temporal blessings on behalf of them all, together with thanksgiving for those received. The three visitors then left.

By means of society like this, and by constant attendance on the theological teaching of the missionary, Prasanna's depression was dispelled, and he often went to the missionary's house and talked with the lady about his beloved Kamini, and had constantly affectionate intercourse with his Christian brethren. He also saw that the theory of all castes becoming one in the Lord Jesus Christ was an undoubted and a very blessed fact. For, whoever their parents may have been, if they showed noble qualities in their disposition and conduct, they were all, as true men and modest women, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, and constantly maintained respectful, affectionate, and happy intercourse with one another.

A special indication of this happy state of things appeared at that time in an incident which happened to Prasanna, when Ram Dayal invited him to his wedding.

On hearing this, Prasanna was very much astonished, and said to him, 'Your wedding! how can that be? who will you marry? The girls here are all too young. Will you marry some one from the outside?'

Ram Dayal answered, 'No; I shall marry some one here; but I doubted whether you, who are such a great

man, might not perhaps be displeased at her low caste, so I did not tell you my secret.'

Prasanna said, 'It is very curious. Who can it be? Surely you are not going to marry one—' then he stopped; and Ram Dayal smiled and said, 'Yes, go on, you must know all about it.' Then Prasanna, guessing, said, 'It is not one of the orphan girls; that is impossible.'

Ram Dayal said, 'It is both possible and is going to be; and after three months you will certainly say that it was a very good thing.'

Prasanna replied, 'What a thing this is! Perhaps her parents were chamars! You ought to think a little.'

Ram Dayal answered, 'I have thought; but I am not going to marry her parents. I do not even know who they were. But I do know that my Susheela is pretty, and sweet, and loving, sensible and faithful, and very dear to me. What more do I want? If you like to be proud about being a Brahman, you may; but in my opinion it is a much better and nobler thing to be a Christian.'

Then Prasanna was ashamed, and perceived that such kind of pride was excessively unworthy and foolish.

On the wedding day all the Christian brethren and sisters assembled in the church, and the missionary called Ram Dayal to him, and made him stand up before them all. Then his wife brought the bride with her, and they both stood by the side of Ram Dayal. Both bride and bridegroom were nicely dressed in graceful and becoming clothes according to their rank, and all their deportment was appropriate and

suitable. The missionary asked them whether they were willing to receive each other in holy marriage, according to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all their lives long, in every condition, they might dwell together in mutual trust and affection. They replied clearly in the presence of God and of all the assembly, 'Yes, that is our wish.' Then they joined hands, and the bridegroom put a ring on the finger of the bride, and the missionary proclaimed abroad to all the people, 'These two are now man and wife; and those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' Then the congregation sang a marriage hymn, and the missionary commended the bride and bridegroom to God in prayer, asking that His blessing might be with them always and in all circumstances. After this they both signed their names in a book, and the marriage ceremony was concluded. Upon this all the Indian brethren and sisters left the church and proceeded to the house of a catechist, where the wedding-feast had been prepared; and they all joined in this, both men and women, according to their custom. Only the bride preferred to take her meal with her former companions at the Orphanage, and after this she and her husband went to their own house.

Prasanna, when he saw the manner in which this wedding was conducted, called to mind the circumstances of his own; and he thought that the Christian mode of marriage was becoming to sensible and religious people, and also appropriate to the service of a holy God; and the great superiority of his accepted faith was more clearly evident to him than ever.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE INCORRUPTIBLE SEED BEARS FRUIT.

WHILE the events recorded in the previous chapter were taking place, Prasanna's uncle, Rajendra, came to have a conversation with him, gave him the family news, and took back to his grandmother and wife all particulars of his circumstances. Prasanna sent through him loving messages to them; and, as Kamini reflected upon the purport of these, she became very sad at heart. Sometimes she even wished that he were really dead; for then she would know certainly what, as a widow, she ought to do. At first the family had said that she was already a widow, and ought to act accordingly. But the grandmother had forbidden this, saying she was sure that her husband would be restored to her. Inspired by this hope, Kamini secretly practised many austerities, and devoted herself most earnestly to the ceremonies of her religion and her daily worship, and, as far as she could, she induced her little sister Anritha to join her in these things. In consequence of all this, the family held her in great honour; but she herself did

not obtain any peace of mind, nor could she in any way feel happy or contented.

In consequence of the message which Rajendra brought from Prasanna to his grandmother, she felt a strong desire to have an interview with him. The infirmity of old age was growing upon her, and if they were not to meet now, perhaps they might never have another opportunity. A friend of Mahendra lived near the mission-house, and, at his mother's request, he made arrangements for her to go there. When she arrived she sent a message to Prasanna to come and see her. On hearing this he came to her at once with great delight, and made most earnest inquiries as to whether all were well at home, whether his father and mother were well, and whether his dear beautiful 'Kamini was well, and said how earnestly he longed to hear her sweet voice and see her bewitching ways.

His grandmother answered, 'Yes, they are all well; but Kamini is constantly out of spirits.' Then she affectionately inquired of him, 'My dear boy, how could you leave us all? and how can you get on without us?'

Prasanna said it was indeed difficult, but it was 'a blessed thing to do even this in the service of God, for He is our loving Father; yes, He is "a sea of love," and He gives peace and comfort.'

Upon this the grandmother said, 'A sea of love, yes, those are the very words—a "sea of love"—which so many years ago I heard at the Sagar Mela, when the missionary saved me from destroying my child; and he said something more beside this—about some one having

made atonement for our sins. What can that have been ?

Prasanna had before heard how his uncle Rajendra's life had been saved ; but he did not know where his grandmother had obtained the Bengalee Gospel. With great pleasure he answered his grandmother's question, 'The missionary must have spoken of Jesus Christ, Who is the Son of God, and Who loved us sinners so much, that He gave His life for our salvation, and whosoever believes on Him will dwell for ever with Him in heaven.'

'Yes, yes, that is it,' the grandmother exclaimed ; 'what wonderful love it was ! But will you always dwell with Him in heaven ? will you not pass through any other birth in this world ?'

Prasanna answered, 'No ; in the book which you gave me it is plainly written that those who enter there will "go no more out for ever, but will for ever dwell with the Lord" who died for them ; and it is a world of the glory of which we can form no conception.'

His grandmother said, 'These are very beautiful words. But tell me, my dear, how you are getting on here.'

Prasanna then gave her a full account of his circumstances, and said, 'Every one here is very kind to me. How I wish that all the people at home knew what kind of love this is ! If Kamini will listen, please tell her how earnestly I wish that she knew what this love is, and that whenever I remember her I intensely long and pray that she may be given to me again.'

The grandmother then said, 'Yes, I will tell her ;

but now I must go home ; and you must never forget that I have always loved you, and every day I pray to the gods for a blessing upon you.'

Prasanna thanked his grandmother, and then they went to their several homes.

After this the grandmother's weakness increased daily, so that at last she was obliged to give up her usual occupation to others, and to be generally sleeping or lying down. Saudamani and Kamini attended to her in turns or together. One day, when they were both present, the grandmother said, 'Kamini, did your husband ever tell you anything about some one who has made atonement for our sins ?'

When Saudamani heard this she thought that in consequence of the fever the grandmother's mind was wandering, and, saying this, she was going to fetch some water to cool her head.

But the grandmother said, 'No, my daughter, I am not out of my senses ; you and Kamini both listen !' Then she again asked the same question.

Kamini replied, 'Yes, he did say to me something of the kind ; I think it was something about the Christian religion.'

The grandmother said, 'Yes, I should like to know a little more about it. I only know this much—that the missionary and Prasanna both said that the Son of God has done this out of love to us.'

Then Saudamani said, 'The Christians say things like that ; but we know this is a thing which can't be true.'

Upon which the grandmother with great earnestness said, 'But I think it must be true, for God has given

to us hearts which are affectionate, and are made to love; and, according to that religion, He is the sea of love, and loves us, and gave His Son for our sakes, that we also might love Him, and, serving Him for ever in heaven, might be filled and satisfied with His love. But who could ever love Shiv or Vishnu?’

After thinking a little, Kamini said, ‘How can that be a religion of love, in consequence of which your grandson has gone away and separated himself from us all?’

The grandmother replied, ‘Is it the Christian religion that has done this, or the Hindu religion? It is we who, in consequence of our religion, have been so hostile to him as to compel him to leave; but he loves us and desires to save us through the love of the Redeemer. Oh, that that Lord would save me! I pray to Him for this; yes, I will believe in Him! and I do love Him too for His unequalled love for us.’

Saudamani was quite bewildered when she heard such language from the lips of her grandmother, and, speaking gently, she said to her, ‘Oh, Thakur ma, you are tired, don’t speak any more, sleep a little.’ Then she went into another room to put her child to sleep. But Kamini stayed with her grandmother, and asked her, ‘Can I know anything more about the teaching of that religion?’

The grandmother replied, ‘Your husband left two or three books in the box which is in the next room. Here is the key; take them out and read them, and if you believe them it will be a very good thing.’ Just then the wife of Mahendra came into the room, and Kamini took the key and went away.

When she was alone in her own room she thought, 'What a wonderful thing it is that the grandmother too believes in this religion! Certainly it must be a very blessed thing to know that God is so full of love, as the Christians say. No one will see me now, so I will just go into the room and bring the books.' Then she went into the room pointed out by her grandmother, took out the books, hid them in her dress, and returned to her own room. Among them was the Gospel which the missionary had given to Mahendra at the Sagar Mela. Kamini at once began to read it, and as she read her mind was so captivated by it that for a long while, instead of going to sleep, she kept on reading. And not only that night, but day and night, whenever she had an opportunity, she did so; and as she continued reading she felt certain that a religion of such holy, self-denying, merciful, and saving love must, without any doubt whatever, have come from God.

While her mind was in this state, one day, when she came to her grandmother, she observed that a great change was apparent in her; for she had become so weak that she could only breathe with difficulty. When she saw Kamini a sweet smile came over her face, and she spoke faintly, saying, 'Sit near to me, that I may keep seeing you.' Kamini sat down. Other members of the family also came and went, but the grandmother did not speak to any of them. Her lips indeed moved, and Kamini leaned over her and asked whether she wanted anything. The grandmother, taking her breath with difficulty, answered

‘Now, no one but the Son of God—can do anything for me—I pray to Him—that He may save me.’ Only Kamini heard these words and understood the meaning of them ; but after a little while the grandmother again spoke in a voice that all could hear, ‘O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who didst die for my sins, take me to dwell with Thee in heaven.’ When Kamini heard this, she joined so earnestly in the prayer that she did not observe how the other persons who had heard it were astonished and bewildered. Just then the priests and Brahmans came to perform the ceremonies for a dying person according to the regulations.

Now, what need can there be to give any account of these ceremonies to the readers of this history ? Kamini was wearied with them, and, thinking them to be useless, continued reading her book and meditating on the Christian resurrection ; and those points which she could not understand she asked Nawa to explain to her. But he had no wish to speak to her plainly about any such matters. Before the grandmother died, Mahendra had, on account of Sarju’s awful death, gone on a pilgrimage to Benares, and from there he had written letters on religious subjects to his son Nawa. About that time, also, the Brahmanical thread was given to Sarju’s son Gopal, and Mahendra endeavoured to make arrangements for the marriage of Amritta. But the Brahmans said that the time was not auspicious. Chandra was given up to dissipation ; and, instead of him, Nawa had to help his father in all these matters. Kamini kept herself separate from

them all, and no one paid much attention to her either. Only Saudamani, who was really a widow, kept up friendship with Kamini, and even listened to what she said about religion. Meanwhile, one day, Nawa brought home intelligence that Prasanna had suddenly been taken ill with an attack of blood-spitting. Nawa had been to see him, and had found him in Ram Dayal's house, and all the people there were taking very great care of him. But when Kamini heard this news she was dreadfully affected by it, and, going into her own room, she burst into tears. From that time the thought came into her mind, 'Let what will happen, I must go to my husband.' Even as she had read in one of Prasanna's books, 'Where thou goest, I will go; where thou dwellest, I will dwell; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest I will die; God do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.'





CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESULTS OF VICTORIOUS FAITH.

THE next day when Kamini awoke the thought of the previous night came instantly into her mind, and she began to consider how she could manage to join her husband, and who she could speak to in planning to do so. Nistarini had gone to her own mother, and the grandmother had gone to the house of her Heavenly Father. Her uncle Rajendra was friendly, but she could not speak to him; there was only Saudamani with whom to consult, for no confidence could be placed in Nawa's disposition. She continued for a fortnight revolving these things in her mind; and at last one day, when she was conversing with Saudamani on religion, she thought her sister listened to her very nicely and seemed inclined towards Christianity. She then began to speak of her husband's sickness, and suddenly this expression escaped her lips, 'Oh, that I could go to him and wait upon him! In my opinion, to keep away from him while he is so ill is the worst offence of all!'

Saudamani was startled to hear this, and said, 'To do so would be great injury and danger to you. You would have to leave father, mother, father-in-law, brother and sister, house and home, caste and everything; but it would not be so difficult for me, who am an orphan and a widow.'

At this a new thought came into Kamini's mind, that perhaps her sister would go with her, and that would be very good. When Saudamani first heard her say this she was alarmed, but on thinking it over she was of opinion that if Kamini really went it would be right for her to take Gopal and Kaumodini along with her. From that time they both talked about this every day together, while their mother-in-law was sleeping and Amritta and Kaumodini played. Eventually the plan they fixed upon was that Kamini should write a letter to her husband, and bribe one of the women-servants to take it to Prasanna, so that he might arrange for their escape.

The next day Kamini called one of the women named Durgamani into her room, and explained to her that she was to do a very important business without speaking to any one about it, and if she did it properly she should be handsomely rewarded. The business was to take a letter secretly to Prasanna, and if she kept the matter quiet and did it well, showing her a gold bracelet, she told her she should have it. Durgamani promised to do it; and that evening Mahendra's wife told her to go into the bazaar to buy some sugar and sweetmeats. On hearing this Durgamani at once ran to Kamini and asked for the letter. Kamini

trembled as she gave it to her, and in her heart she offered a kind of prayer to God that by His blessing the plan might be successful.

When Durgamani had bought the sugar and sweetmeats in the bazaar, she went to the mission compound, and asked the gatekeeper if Prasanna Kumar Chatarji was living there. Just then Prasanna himself came out of the door of his house, and seeing Durgamani, recognised her, and with great eagerness asked for news of the family. Then Durgamani told him the news and gave him at the same time Kamini's letter. When he went into his room and read the letter, he was overwhelmed with astonishment and gratitude. For that Kamini should become a Christian, and that Saudamani, Sarju's widow, should be willing to come with her, seemed to him a thing utterly impossible, and he at once felt that God's thoughts and ways are not as ours. He then went to the missionary and his wife, and with their advice he arranged, and sent a message by Durgamani, that on the day after the morrow, at seven o'clock in the evening, Kamini and Saudamani and the two children should be ready, and the missionary and Prasanna would come in a gari to the lane at the back of the house, to bring them to the mission compound. Durgamani then returned home and privately told Kamini all these particulars.

For two days Kamini and Saudamani were in a state of great perturbation, because it was necessary for them to get some of their clothes, jewels, and other things ready; but they must do it in such a way

that none of the family might know it. On the second day, in the evening, everything was ready, and Kamini trembled. As she was thinking of that other evening on which Prasanna had left her, all at once Durgamani came and said, 'Be quick; the gari has come, and the Babu has made a sign.' Then in the evening twilight they took the children and went out and took their seats in the gari. Kamini gave Durgamani the promised bracelet. The gari was driven as quickly as possible to the mission-house. On the way they could not say much to each other; but when they arrived at Ram Dayal's house they were gradually able to say all that was in their hearts.

On the same evening on which Kamini and Saudamani escaped from their father-in-law's house, Mahendra returned home very weary and vexed, and said to his wife, 'I don't know what we shall do. Chandra has been losing ever so much money in gambling. Then the ruin of that wretched boy, and the horrible death of Sarju; the funeral ceremonies for my mother; my pilgrimage to Benares; giving Gopal his Brahmanical thread and other things, have cost me no end of money; and Amritta is not married yet, nor does she seem very likely to be.' His wife gave him his evening meal, and did all she could to comfort him. But the next morning, when it was known that the daughters-in-law and the children were nowhere to be found, it is impossible to describe the state of the family. They hunted in every direction, but could find no trace of them, except that in one corner they saw the old book which more than

fifty years before the missionary had given to Mahendra at the Sagar Mela. He had never seen it since, but now when he saw it he knew it, and the thought came into his mind that this had been the cause of all his troubles. In one way, perhaps, this thought was a correct one; for to hate and oppose the teaching of that Book is sure to prove the cause of all kinds of troubles; and if it had not come amongst them, they would not have opposed it. But if they had all accepted it, like Prasanna, and acted in accordance with its teaching, it would surely have brought innumerable blessings to them all. For then Sarju would never have gone mad, and Chandra would not have been a dissipated gambler, and Rajendra and Nawa would not have been fickle and untrustworthy, and Mahendra and the rest of the family, escaping from blind tradition, would not have continued bigoted and proud idolaters. But, as free agents, they had made their own choice, and they had to reap the mournful consequences. The saying of the Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly true: 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

Prasanna believed in the Lord, accepted His word, acted in accordance with it, and was ready to lose even his life for the Lord's sake; and there has been some account, in this affecting history, of all the affliction and pain which this had caused him. With

the help of the Lord, his faith was victorious, and by means of it other persons too, who were very dear to him, had become believers; and so their faith and joy in the Lord day by day continually increased. For a few weeks they continued in Ram Dayal's house, and received all kinds of assistance and kindness from him and his wife Susheela. Under Kamini's loving attendance Prasanna soon got better of his sickness; and by his teaching she daily grew in religious knowledge and faith. A separate house had been assigned to them in the mission compound, but it needed some repair, and Prasanna wished that, if possible, both Kamini and Saudamani might receive baptism before they went to live in it. Meanwhile Susheela also was teaching Saudamani, and another little house was set apart for her and her children, near to Prasanna's. In those days it was necessary, in consequence of the enmity and persecution of relatives, to make this arrangement for new disciples; and in some places it is necessary even still. Otherwise, in order to fulfil the saying of our Lord to His disciples, 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' it is right that they should continue to live among their own friends and relatives. And gradually this too will come to pass. When the baptisms had taken place, and they had gone to their own homes, an intelligent, well-behaved, and religious Christian brother was desirous of being married to Saudamani, and he sent a message to this effect to her through Susheela. But Saudamani answered, 'Why should I marry again? Although it is not contrary to the Christian law, still I wish to spend my life in pro-

moting the improvement and education of my children, and in the service of my dear Redeemer.' Every one honoured her very much for this decision; and by the grace of the Lord she became a very spiritual believer, and a true loving helper to all the sisters and the children. One day, when Prasanna saw his younger brother Nawa in the bazaar, he brought him home with him; and he too was very much pleased at what Saudamani had done; and when he saw the circumstances of them all he was delighted. But in religious matters he remained as undecided as ever, and it is probable that at last he died in this condition. Both he and his uncle Rajendra are instructive, melancholy, and awful examples of those who, through worldly covetousness or fear, violently stifle the voice of conscience.

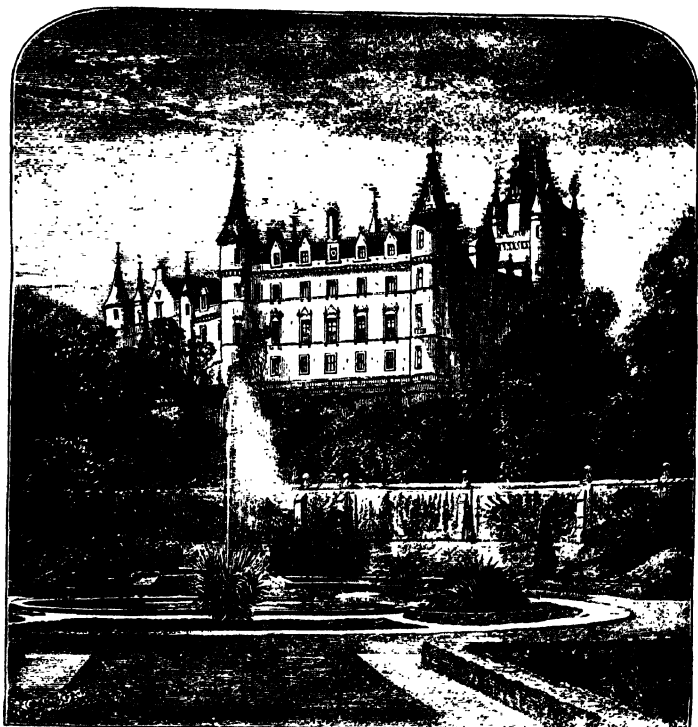
After a few months, the joy and delight of Prasanna and Kamini were filled to overflowing, when the Lord gave them a dear little son. In these happy circumstances a conversation took place between them, with which we will close this affecting history. Prasanna said, 'See, dear Kamini, how God has blessed us. He taught me His true wisdom, and gave me true faith; and when I was in despair He restored you to me as a dear Christian wife. And now the happiness of us both is filled to the brim by this new blessing.'

He was holding his little boy in his arms, and Kamini, kissing the dear child, said, 'Yes, indeed, He has shown very great kindness to us. Let us give thanks to Him for it.' Prasanna then prayed with

her to God, that He would keep their minds ever grateful for all His great love to them, and that He would preserve them and their child, so that they might be a loving, happy, Christian family, and spend their whole lives in His service.

THE END.

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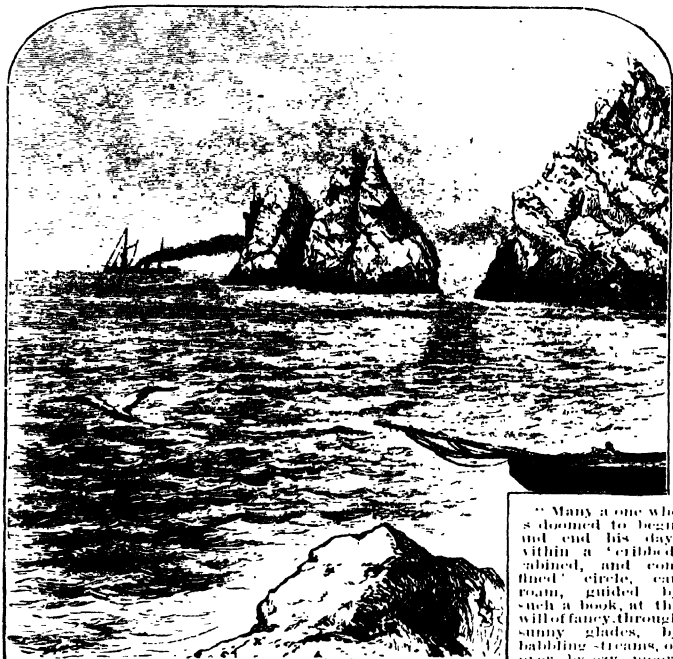
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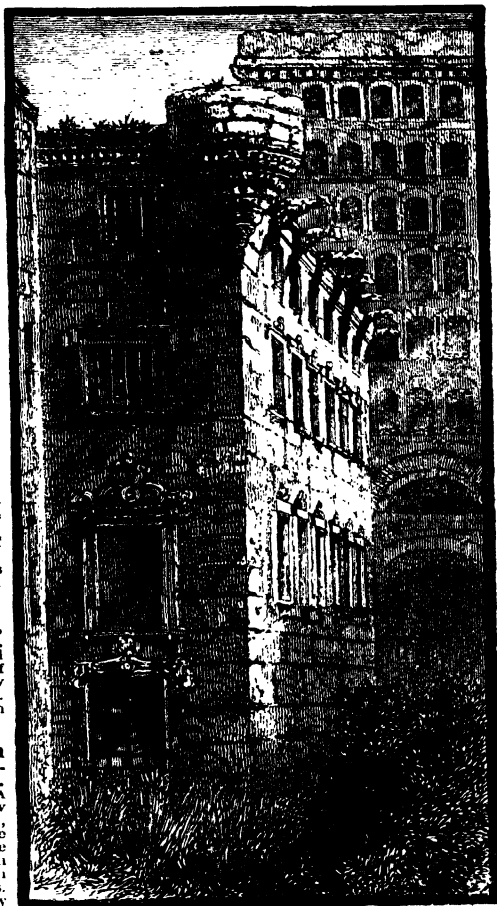
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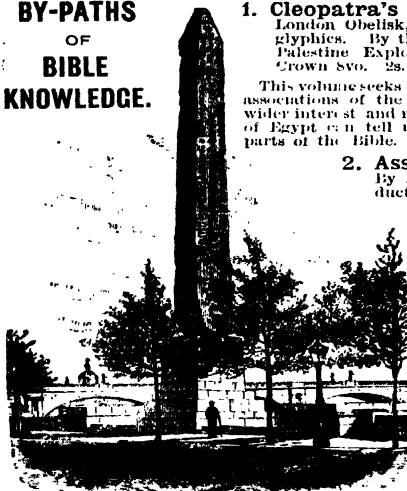
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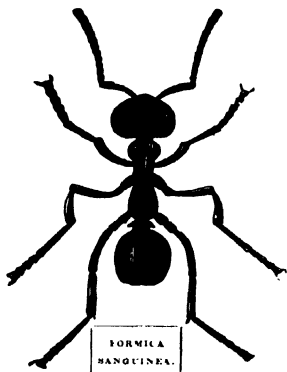
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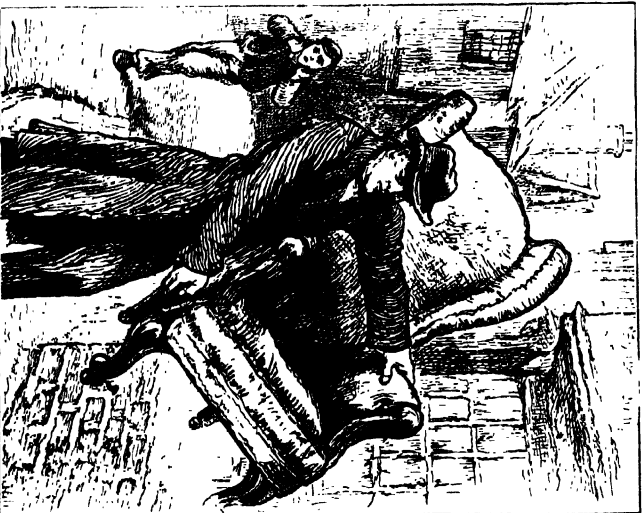
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